

Contemporary British Coming-of-Age Films (1979 to the Present)

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Declaration of Authorship

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Royal Holloway, University of London. This work is original, except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the thesis has been submitted for any other academic award. Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author.

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Date: 19th January 2018

Abstract

Locating itself in relation to existing work on youth in, primarily American, cinema, the thesis questions the analytical usefulness of conceptualising the ‘youth/teen film’ as a genre and, instead, seeks to establish the value of analysing the ‘coming-of-age film’ as a genre involving the employment of adolescent protagonists. In setting out to do so, it focuses on films which are set in Britain, made from 1979 onwards, and rarely discussed as coming-of-age films (or, indeed, youth/teen films), but which may be seen to benefit from such a critical approach.

Following a survey of a range of anthropological, biological, historical, juridical, psychoanalytic, psychological and sociological approaches to adolescence, as well as scholarship on the literary precursor of the coming-of-age film, the *Bildungsroman*, and on the relationship between adolescence and cinema, a working definition of the coming-of-age genre is proposed. This then leads to an examination of the specific manifestation of the coming-of-age film in contemporary British cinema. Contemporary British coming-of-age films, it is argued, may be divided into three central strands – male adolescent protagonists, female adolescent protagonists, and adolescent protagonists from a minority ‘racial’ and/or ethnic background – and discussion of a wide range of films reveals how the variables of class, gender, ‘race’, ethnicity, and sexuality are shown to shape the identity formation of the assorted protagonists within the selected films, as well as intersect with social, political, economic and cultural concerns of the period. Placing an emphasis upon the shared features of the films, the thesis also identifies how the repeated appearance of certain issues, character types, plot devices, and narrative arcs establish lines of continuity that cut across the generic hybridity, and thematic, formal and stylistic diversity of the body of work at hand.

In particular, the thesis posits that there are three main types of trajectory (successful or failed individualisation and socialisation, and more ambivalent outcomes) – aligning the contemporary British coming-of-age film with the tradition of the European *Bildungsroman* – and exemplifies this in an exploration of the influence of British cinema’s longstanding tradition of social realism upon the male-centred narratives. Furthermore, the thesis identifies the importance of the figure of the brother to a number of the stories of male adolescence, and the significance of the configuration of the girl and the man to many of the tales of female adolescence. Moreover, a focus on the treatment of ‘race’ and ethnicity reveals how the contemporary British coming-of-age film is a popular vehicle for the interrogation of the experiences of first, second and third-generation immigrants. In this way, the thesis establishes the importance of the category of the coming-of-age film for an understanding of some of the key themes and concerns of contemporary British cinema.

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Introduction

‘We [psychoanalysts] who know so much about the child in the adult know so much less about the fate of the adolescent in him, whether as a continued source of renewal or as a split-off younger self alternately idealized and repudiated, revived and “murdered” – and, of course, reprojected on the young.’

Erik Erikson, *Life History and the Historical Moment* (1975: 222)

Context

Interest in cinematic portrayals of childhood is burgeoning, both within and without the Academy. Recent years have brought: Frances Gateward and Murray Pomerance’s anthologies *Sugar, Spice and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood* (2002) and *Where the Boys Are: Cinemas of Masculinity and Youth* (2005); Emma Wilson’s monograph *Cinema’s Missing Children* (2003); Vicky Lebeau’s monograph *Childhood and Cinema* (2008); Karen Lury’s monograph *The Child in Film – Tears, Fears and Fairy Tales* (2010); a University College London symposium entitled ‘The Girl in Global Cinema’ (12th July 2013); Mark Cousins’s film *The Story of Children and Film* (2013); a BFI season curated by Cousins, ‘The Cinema of Childhood’, comprising seventeen films about children, from twelve different countries (11th April - 28th June 2014); a Leverhulme Trust project entitled ‘Childhood and Nation in World Cinema: Borders and Encounters Since 1980’ (1st July 2014 - 30th June 2016); Fiona Handyside and Kate Taylor-Jones’s anthology *International Cinema and the Girl: Local Issues, Transnational Contexts* (2016), inspired by the aforementioned UCL symposium; and Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, Wilson and Sarah Wright’s anthology *Childhood and Nation in World Cinema: Borders and Encounters* (2017), inspired by the aforementioned Leverhulme Trust project.

Further to this, it is essential to recognise that a number of these publications include discussions of films that are, more accurately, about adolescence. For example, the first of the three sections that make up *Sugar, Spice and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood* (Gateward and Pomerance 2002) is entitled ‘Girls II Women’ and ‘explores issues related to the trials and tribulations girls experience in the coming-of-age process’ (17). And Barbara Klinger states of *Where the Boys Are: Cinemas of Masculinity and Youth* (Gateward and Pomerance 2005) that it presents a ‘multifaceted’ response to the question of ‘what ... the coming-of-age narrative reveal[s] about the process of becoming a man’ (back cover). Indeed, the relationship between adolescence and cinema may be said to be an established field of academic enquiry in itself, with publications such as: David Considine’s monograph *The Cinema of Adolescence* (1985); Jon Lewis’s monograph *The Road to Romance and Ruin: Teen Film and Youth Culture* (1992); Thomas Doherty’s monograph *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s* (2002); Timothy Shary’s monograph

Generation Multiplex: The Image of Youth in Contemporary Cinema (2002); Sarah Hentges's monograph *Pictures of Girlhood: Modern Female Adolescence on Film* (2005); Shary's introductory book *Teen Movies: American Youth on Screen* (2005); Steve Neale's section on 'Teenpics' in *The Cinema Book* (2007); Shary and Alexandra Seibel's anthology *Youth Cinema in Global Culture* (2007); Anne Hardcastle, Roberta Morosini and Kendall Tarte's anthology *Coming of Age on Film: Stories of Transformation in World Cinema* (2009); and Catherine Driscoll's monograph *Teen Film: A Critical Introduction* (2011). In addition, 2014 saw the release of film critic Charlie Lyne's documentary *Beyond Clueless*, which – described on its accompanying website as 'a dizzying journey into the mind, body and soul of the teen movie, as seen through the eyes of over 200 modern coming-of-age classics' – trains its lens on American 'teen movies' from the period 1994-2004 (*Beyond Clueless* website) and was one of fourteen films to form the BFI season 'Teenage Kicks' (1st-31st August 2014):

'School might be out for summer, but throughout August BFI Southbank will be heading back to the classroom for lessons in teen angst, love and rebellion with Teenage Kicks, a month-long season dedicated to the teen on screen. From James Dean's rebellious leading man in *Rebel Without a Cause*, to John Hughes' infamous brat pack and the *Mean Girls* of the noughties, the teenager is firmly ensconced in cinema history. Teenage Kicks will look beyond the veneer of the 'brat pack' to showcase wildly varied portrayals of the teen, encouraging audiences – whether they're young or not so young – to reflect upon those "in-between" years. The season will include screenings of cult hits such as *If...* (1968), *Heathers* (1988) and *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (1992) as well as films met with controversy on their original release including *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) and *Kids* (1996), and there will be talks and specially curated events as part of BFI Future Film to tie in with the season' (BFI press release, 27th June 2014).

There is a gap, however, and a significant one at that. Whilst some of the aforementioned publications feature a handful of British titles, most of the scholarship is dedicated to examining American, especially Hollywood, cinema. And although it is not hard to locate literature on British films with adolescent protagonists or adolescent audiences in Britain, there has been no attempt to provide a sustained analysis of the stories that British cinema has told about adolescence or to adolescents. The closest fit is John Hill's *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-1963* (1986), but its juxtaposition of ideas about adolescence with a wide range of other topics makes it substantially different from the work of Considine et al.

Importantly, too, there is a lack of clarity regarding nomenclature. Firstly, the terms 'teenpic', 'teen film', 'youth film', 'coming-of-age film' and 'rite-of-passage film' circulate without consensus as to their meaning – the first three of these labels, in particular, sometimes employed to denote films with adolescent protagonists, sometimes used to refer to films aimed at an adolescent audience, and sometimes applied to films with both characteristics. Secondly, there is no agreement as to whether such tags identify industrially-generated generic categories or theoretically-generated (generic) categories. And thirdly, it is interesting to note that the film industry and film critics display a tendency to limit the deployment of the 'coming-of-age film' handle to designate only those

narratives which bring their adolescent protagonists' journeys to overwhelmingly buoyant and strikingly neat conclusions (the classic 'feel-good' denouement), inexplicably reluctant to recognise those tales which end on either a pessimistic or ambivalent note as 'coming-of-age films' too.

Definitions and Scope

After a consideration of three initial areas of enquiry – influential theories about adolescence, scholarship on the literary precursor of the coming-of-age film, the *Bildungsroman*, and scholarship on the relationship between adolescence and cinema – this thesis addresses the issue of classification. Firstly, it is suggested that because the terms 'teenpic', 'teen film' and 'youth film' give rise to the potential conflation of films with adolescent protagonists and films directed at an adolescent audience, the 'coming-of-age film' label is the most suitable descriptor for the former. Secondly, it is argued that whilst generic hybridity, and thematic, formal and stylistic diversity can be observed across coming-of-age films, lines of continuity, predominantly in the form of the repeated appearance of certain issues, character types, plot devices and narrative arcs, constitute a generic framework and thus it makes sense to talk of the coming-of-age genre as a theoretically-generated category that is to some extent used by the film industry and film critics. And thirdly, it is proposed that in the same way that the definition of the *Bildungsroman* has been broadened over time to include novels with tragic, ominous or indeterminate endings, not merely those depicting successful individualisation and socialisation, so the 'coming-of-age film' handle should be liberated from its current narrow usage by the film industry and film critics.

Following this, the thesis turns to an examination of the manifestation of the coming-of-age genre in contemporary British cinema, specifically, 1979 to the present day, and crucially, the films have been selected using an inclusive but, nevertheless, precise set of criteria. Firstly, the narrative must revolve around an individual adolescent protagonist or a pair or small group of adolescent protagonists, not simply feature an adolescent character or adolescent characters – the key difference being that the former type highlights adolescent identity formation, their becoming/development/emergence/evolution/growth/metamorphosis/transition/transformation, whilst the latter does not. Secondly, the protagonist or protagonists must be between the age of ten and the age of twenty-five, which, as explained in Chapter One, is the period that adolescence is now generally believed to comprise in western societies. Thirdly, although the question of what constitutes a British film is itself a debate, this thesis stems from an interest in cinematic representations of adolescent life in Britain and therefore the majority of the action must be set in Britain. Fourthly, as the following section details, the film must be made from 1979 onwards. And lastly, the film must have had a cinematic release and/or been made for television.

When it came to building the corpus of films for analysis, I first listed all of the films that I knew fitted the aforementioned criteria, and then scoured scholarship on British cinema, scholarship on films about youth, the BFI website (including the *Sight and Sound* archives), and those websites to which one is directed when conducting an Internet search for '(British) coming-of-age films', '(British) films about youth' and '(British) teen film'. Hence one hundred and seventy-eight films are under consideration – one hundred and fourteen with male protagonists, fifty-one with female protagonists, and thirteen with both male and female protagonists – and importantly, various titles initially made it into the filmography, but were then rejected after further thought. For instance, although *The Firm* (1989), *Brassed Off* (1996), *About a Boy* (2002), *Eden Lake* (2008), *Harry Brown* (2009) and *Cherry Tree Lane* (2010) contain prominent adolescent characters, the narratives foreground the adult protagonists. And whilst the sense of personal evolution that marks the coming-of-age film can be seen in titles such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001), *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (2004), *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2011), *The Iron Lady* (2011), *Song for Marion* (2012), *Le Week-End* (2013), *The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2015) and *Bridget Jones's Baby* (2016), these were put to one side because the protagonists are over the age of twenty-five.

Indeed, I had not anticipated the scale of the final filmography and, although the process of establishing an evidence base has in itself served to illuminate a vital but underappreciated strand of contemporary British cinema, such breadth has brought challenges not only in terms of time management, the organisation of notes, and the retention of protagonists' names and plot details, but also in the way that it has shaped the nature of the analysis undertaken. As indicated in Chapter Two, a more extensive exploration of generic hybridity, especially within the context of a general decline in the production of the staple genres of British cinema, would shed significant light upon the character of the contemporary British coming-of-age film. And as outlined in Chapter Four, there is, alongside the generic hybridity, a group of films which seem hard to classify as anything other than 'coming-of-age films', since they arguably accentuate the personal growth of their adolescent protagonist or protagonists above all else, and it would be productive to compare these particular titles. However, it has been difficult to pursue these concerns because of the sheer volume of material, and they are therefore areas for future enquiry. Moreover, whilst an attempt has been made to acknowledge the role of stylistic features in reinforcing or complicating certain patterns, the emphasis upon generic continuities across a large body of work means that discussion of the films remains mainly at the level of plot and character. Thus, some of the complexities of individual films have not been teased out fully.

A National Cinema and Periodisation

Behind the decision to focus upon a national cinema at a time when film scholarship at large is generating a 'gradual shift from an understanding of cinema in terms of national identity to an acknowledgement of the conceptual value of the transnational' (Leggott 2008: 34) lies the conviction that British coming-of-age films may be differentiated from their much-discussed American counterparts in their treatment of youth, and that the idiosyncrasies of the former are well-deserving of thorough analysis. And with regard to periodisation, the choice to concentrate upon films made from 1979 onwards stems from an interest in the effects of neoliberalism upon young people, as the Thatcher era and post-Thatcher era have ushered in an end to a post-war social-democratic consensus and the arrival of the dominance of free-market economics, the espousal of individualism, and the promotion of entrepreneurship, and I believe that it is important to look at the consequences for those growing up in such an environment. Whilst some hail neoliberal ideology as the route to prosperity, the 'natural order' and, even, the very definition of liberty, others deplore its elevation of self-interest, emphasis upon competition, and myth of meritocracy – claiming that economic and political decision-making informed by such thinking has not merely exacerbated socio-economic disadvantage, but led to gross levels of inequality, and that the infiltration of market forces into public services is tantamount to the privatisation of once publicly funded, run and accountable bodies, whose defunding, in the name of 'austerity measures' from 2010 onwards, prepares the ground accordingly:

'It could be argued that we are witnessing the complete collapse of civil society[.] ... This period ... is one of massive transformation of the social fabric of Britain, a transformation in which patterns of inequality are no less stark, just differently organised. Hence, the terror of those working in the public sector about loss of security, status and salary, the loss by most people of any sense of job security, the uncertainties facing young people with low or no qualifications. All this at a time when Britain is witnessing no absence of wealth, especially in the south-east. Indeed the media are full of stories of executives on million pound bonuses enjoying spending sprees' (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001: 3-8).

That is, although neoliberalism is not a doctrine, its precepts have become the guiding principles of the global economic system, generating a palpable shift within the economy and politics, not just signalling the advent of a new set of ideas or old ideas refurbished. Obviously, the films in question may not be read simply as reflections of contemporary British society. As Hill insists, 'films do more than just "reflect"; they also actively explain and interpret the way in which the world is to be perceived and understood' (1986: 2). Furthermore, no period can ever be encapsulated by or, indeed, reduced to a single philosophy. Nevertheless, not only do many of the titles speak to contemporary social, political, economic and cultural concerns, including those set in the past, but the 'neoliberal turn', as it has been dubbed by some commentators, seems to have coincided with a resurgence of the British coming-of-age film, which has provided a vehicle for dramatising many of the changes of the time, and my research seeks to understand this phenomenon

better. Franco Moretti's stance on the nineteenth-century European *Bildungsroman*, is instructive: 'Youth acts as a sort of *symbolic concentrate* of the uncertainties and tensions of an entire cultural system, and the hero's growth becomes the narrative convention or *fiction* that permits the exploration of conflicting values' (2000: 185). Indeed, as Christine Griffin asserts of the relationship between the condition of youth and the shape of society:

"Youth" is ... treated as a key indicator of the state of the nation itself: it is expected to reflect the cycle of booms and troughs in the economy; shifts in cultural values over sexuality, morality and family life; and changes in class relations, concepts of nationhood, and occupational structures. To some extent the nation itself is produced and understood through representations of "youth". The treatment and management of "youth" is expected to provide the solution of a nation's "problems", from "drug abuse", "hooliganism" and "teenage pregnancy" to inner city "riots". The young are assumed to hold the key to the nation's future: if official levels of unemployment rise or the incidence of violent crime increases, this can be attributed to "problem youth", and a whole series of "respectable fears" have been dealt with in this way (Pearson, 1983)' (1993: 197-198).¹

To be more precise, the period may be divided usefully into Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government of 1979-1992, John Major's Conservative government of 1992-1997, Tony Blair's Labour government of 1997-2007, Gordon Brown's Labour government of 2007-2010, David Cameron and Nick Clegg's Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government of 2010-2015, and the present day Conservative government led by Theresa May, for although it is impossible to make definitive connections between the traits of each government, and the character of the contemporary British coming-of-age film – between, that is, thirty-eight years of political history and one hundred and seventy-eight films – each government has played a key part in shaping the conditions in which young people in Britain have come of age and, correspondingly, several titles explore various ways in which certain political decisions have impacted upon the lives and, indeed, life chances of young people, often carrying either pro or anti-government sentiment, with a tendency towards the latter.

To begin with, one of the manifestations of Thatcher's government's faith in and, indeed, fetishisation of the free market was 'an abandonment of the commitment to full employment' (Hill 1999: 5), which, importantly, continued throughout the Blair, Brown, and Cameron and Clegg years – and still pertains – and which the contemporary British coming-of-age film may be said to register in two main ways. On one side, a number of films follow, or in part follow, unemployed protagonists (*That Sinking Feeling* [1979], *Meantime* [1983],

¹ For example, within the period at hand, there has been much anxiety about the qualities of 'Generation X' and 'Millennials' – labels denoting, respectively, those born between the early 1960s and the early 1980s, and those born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s. There is general agreement that photographer Robert Capa coined the term 'Generation X' when he used it as the title of a photo essay about young people reaching adulthood in the wake of World War II. Appearing in 1953 in *Picture Post* (UK) and *Holiday* (USA), Capa said of the publication: 'We named this unknown generation, The Generation X, and even in our first enthusiasm we realised that we had something far bigger than our talents and pockets could cope with.' Following this came a collection of interviews with teenagers, brought together by journalists Jane Deverson and Charles Hamblett in paperback form in 1964, also called *Generation X*, and 1991 brought Douglas Copeland's novel *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. The term 'Millennials' was coined by William Strauss and Neil Howe in their book *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584-2069* (1991).

Shopping [1994], *Stella Does Tricks* [1996], *Twin Town* [1997], *Human Traffic* [1999], *Bullet Boy* [2004], *London to Brighton* [2006], *How To Be* [2008] and *My Brother the Devil* [2012]) – particularly those who have turned to illegal activity, such as theft (*That Sinking Feeling* [1979] and *Shopping* [1994]), drug taking (*Human Traffic* [1999]), drug dealing (*My Brother the Devil* [2012]), gun crime (*Bullet Boy* [2004]), and prostitution (*Stella Does Tricks* [1996] and *London to Brighton* [2006]) – arguably providing a commentary upon youth unemployment, which has remained high in comparison with overall unemployment figures in the period at hand, rising ‘in each of the last three recessions and the immediate years following their end’ (ONS report ‘Characteristics of Young Unemployed People’ 2012)². On the other side, some films feature a father who has lost his job or is at risk of losing his job in heavy industry, leading to precarity for the family, and – crucially – counterbalance the father’s misfortune with his son’s rejection of traditional models of masculinity, and eventual ‘escape’ (*Billy Elliot* [2000] and *Gabriel and Me* [2001]). Ergo, it can be seen that a notable selection of contemporary British coming-of-age films recognise unemployment as a critical factor for those coming of age in contemporary Britain, seeking typically to illustrate its detrimental effects upon the already socio-economically disadvantaged, and to highlight the questionable choices that it can lead people to make, but sometimes optimistic, too, about the younger generation’s chances of success³.

Alongside its (misplaced) faith in the free market, Thatcher’s government was also marked by a certain ‘social neo-conservatism’ (Hill 1999: 8), which included ‘a rhetoric of familialism and anti-permissiveness, and an increased intolerance of sexual difference, as manifest in the notorious Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act’ (Hill 1999: 10). Specifically, Section 28, which was not repealed until 2003, stated that a Local Authority ‘shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of

² Official youth unemployment figures are, like official unemployment figures at large, to be treated with caution:

Official youth unemployment figures cannot be interpreted as an accurate reflection of the numbers of young people outside waged work at any given time. In order to be included on official unemployment registers young people have to fulfil a number of criteria, which in Britain varied considerably as the [1980s] wore on. Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government had introduced no fewer than *sixteen* changes to the methods of calculating the official unemployment figures between 1979 and 1996. By the end of the decade, there had been *nineteen* changes in all, only one of which had produced an increase in the unemployment level, and even then this was quickly obscured by a compensatory mechanism’ (Griffin 1993: 71).

Nevertheless, as the cited 2012 ONS report states: ‘The current total of 1.04 million compares with peaks of 924,000 in 1993 and 1.2 million in 1984. Excluding students, today’s total of 731,000 (10 per cent of the youth population) compares with 832,000 (12 per cent) in 1993 and 1.1 million (14 per cent) in 1984.’ In other words, youth unemployment figures have remained high in comparison with overall unemployment figures, which have moved between about five and ten per cent in the period at hand.

³ Interestingly, even when young people are depicted at work, there is usually little sense of fulfilment (*Quadrophenia* [1979], *Babylon* [1980], *Burning an Illusion* [1981], *Letter to Brezhnev* [1985], *Wild West* [1992], *Human Traffic* [1999] and *Albatross* [2011]), with portrayals of meaningful employment appearing almost exclusively in those narratives set in the past (*Wish You Were Here* [1987], *An Awfully Big Adventure* [1995], *Atonement* [2007], *Control* [2007] and *Testament of Youth* [2014]), and the most common alternative to a conventional job shown to be either joining a band (*Buddy’s Song* [1991], *Wild West* [1992], *Backbeat* [1994], *Babymother* [1998], *Velvet Goldmine* [1998], *Rage* [1999], *Control* [2007] and *Nowhere Boy* [2009]) or becoming a DJ (*Young Soul Rebels* [1991]) and *Kevin and Perry Go Large* [2000]).

promoting homosexuality’ or ‘promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship’. And in conjunction with inhibitory legislation regarding the age of consent for homosexual activity – twenty-one from 1967-1994, eighteen from 1994-2001, and sixteen from 2001 onwards – it may be said that Britain of the 1980s and 1990s was, on one level, a repressive environment for people identifying as LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Intersex), especially those under the age of twenty-one/eighteen.

Nevertheless, as Jackie Stacey contends:

‘Rather than silencing and marginalizing lesbians and gays, the introduction of Section 28 set in motion an unprecedented proliferation of activities which put homosexuality firmly on the agenda in Britain in 1988-9. The terms of the public debate may have been set by the right, but the widespread resistance to the Section and its implications brought about greater visibility, a strengthened lesbian and gay community and a politicized national and international network of lesbian and gay activists’ (Stacey 1991: 302 cited in Hill 1999: 13).

Indeed, as Leonard Quart claims, ‘the English films of the eighties produced one of the few effective political weapons against the Thatcher tide’ (1994: 242), and accordingly, laying challenge to a heterosexist age of consent, Section 28, and homophobia in general are several contemporary British titles in which coming of age is in part or by and large framed as coming to terms with one’s sexuality and, in some cases, coming out (*Another Country* [1984], *My Beautiful Launderette* [1985], *Maurice* [1987], *Two of Us* [1987], *The Fruit Machine* [1988], *Young Soul Rebels* [1991], *The Long Day Closes* [1992], *Beautiful Thing* [1996], *Get Real* [1999], *Borstal Boy* [2000], *A.K.A.* [2002], *Shank* [2009], *Toast* [2010], *My Brother the Devil* [2012], *Pride* [2014] and *The Pass* [2016]).

In particular, many of the films in question explore the difficulties that can arise from being or feeling compelled to conceal one’s sexual orientation, with some offering an insight into a time when homosexuality was illegal (*Another Country* [1984], *Maurice* [1987], *The Long Day Closes* [1992] and *Borstal Boy* [2000]), and some revolving around, or in part revolving around, underage homosexual males (*Two of Us* [1987], *The Fruit Machine* [1988], *Beautiful Thing* [1996], *Get Real* [1999], *A.K.A.* [2002], *Toast* [2010] and *Pride* [2014]), most of whom are, conspicuously, either at the age of heterosexual consent, or between the age of heterosexual consent and the age of homosexual consent. Indeed, one production (*Two of Us* [1987]) is markedly controversial in that it focuses upon a pair of homosexual school leavers and was made by none other than the BBC *Schools Scene* series (1968-2002) in an especially pivotal year – namely, the year after various newspapers reported that Susanne Bösché’s children’s book about a five-year-old girl living with her father and his boyfriend, *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin* (Danish version 1981, English version 1983), had made its way into one of Haringey’s school libraries, when, in fact, it was only available in an ILEA (Inner London Education Authority) centre to loan to teachers, and the year before the passing of Section 28, which was in part a result of the aforementioned furore (Clews 2017: 129-137). Furthermore, the intersection of issues of sexual orientation and issues of class is

notable, as seen in portrayals of intimacy between working-class protagonists and middle-class protagonists, working-class protagonists and upper-class protagonists, and middle-class protagonists and upper-class protagonists (*My Beautiful Launderette* [1985], *Maurice* [1987], *A.K.A.* [2002] and *My Brother the Devil* [2012]). In summary, then, whilst a distinct lack of coverage of female homosexuality is problematic, the contemporary British coming-of-age film proves a radical vehicle for the diverse representation of male homosexuality, arguably providing a counterpoint to discrimination in a period in which the fight for LGBTQI equality has certainly made gains, but also suffered setbacks.

If Section 28 served to both oppress and galvanise, so too have aspects of police behaviour in the period at hand, in particular, in communities with pronounced socio-economic deprivation and a large proportion of people from a minority 'racial'⁴ and/or ethnic⁵ background, where the misuse and abuse of stop and search powers have led to accusations of 'institutional racism' (the police, perceived to be an arm of the state) and tensions sometimes culminating in riots. For instance, in April 1981, 'Operation Swamp 81' saw an attempt by the Metropolitan Police to use the 'sus' law to cut crime in Brixton, where about a quarter of residents were from a minority 'racial' and/or ethnic background, and about half of young black people were unemployed (John 2006). And although it is important to note that the relationship between the community and the police was already troubled, a perceived heavy-handedness on the part of the latter led sections of the former to riot – with people hurt, widespread looting, and buildings and cars damaged or destroyed – prompting the government to commission an enquiry, the Scarman Report, which cited 'complex political, social and economic factors' in the 'disposition toward violent protest', and concluded that 'institutional racism' did not exist, pointing instead to 'racial disadvantage' and 'racial discrimination', and recommending reforms with the aim of improving relations between the police and minority 'racial' and/or ethnic groups. Further to this, assessments of riots later in the period (Southall, Toxteth, Moss Side, Handsworth, Chapeltown and Hyson Green in July 1981, Brixton, Peckham, Toxteth and Tottenham in 1985, Chapeltown in 1987, Brixton and Manningham in 1995, Bradford in 2001, and various cities and towns across England in 2011) point to three key factors at play in the

⁴ I am sceptical of scientific theories of 'race', concurring with UNESCO's 1978 Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice: 'All human beings belong to a single species and are descended from a common stock. They are born equal in dignity and rights and all form an integral part of humanity' (Giddens and Sutton 2013: 676). As John Storey states, 'The first thing to insist on in discussions of "race" is that there is just one "race", the human race. Human biology does not divide people into different "races"' (2015: 175). And as Paul Gilroy asserts, "'Race" has to be socially and politically constructed and elaborate ideological work is done to secure and maintain the different forms of "racialization"' (2002: 35 cited in Storey 2015: 176). That is, 'human beings come in different colours and with different physical features, but ... these differences do not issue meanings; they have to be made to mean' (Storey 2015: 175). Nevertheless, as Anthony Giddens and Philip W. Sutton claim, "'race" still has meaning for many people, even though its scientific basis has been discredited. Hence, it remains a vital, if highly contested concept' (2013: 676). Accordingly, I utilise the concept of 'race', but always place the words 'race', 'racism', 'racist', 'racial', etc. in inverted commas.

⁵ I 'favour the concept of "ethnicity" over "race" because it carries no inaccurate fixed biological reference', denoting, instead, socially and culturally-constructed characteristics, such as 'language, history or ancestry (real or imagined), religion, and styles of dress or adornment' (Giddens and Sutton 2013: 677).

communities affected: unemployment disproportionately affecting school leavers and those from a minority 'racial' and/or ethnic background, creating a strong sense of disenfranchisement; high levels of crime leading to frequent confrontations with the police; and hostilities between people from differing 'racial' and/or ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, another enquiry commissioned by the government in 1999, the Macpherson Report, scrutinised the Metropolitan Police's investigation into the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993, and delivered a damning indictment of 'institutional racism' within the Metropolitan Police and policing generally. Indeed, in spite of the findings and recommendations of both enquiries, and measures including the abolishment of the 'sus' law in 1981, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) 1984, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (CJPOA) 1994, the raft of anti-terrorism acts passed under New Labour (such as the Terrorism Act 2000, the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, the Criminal Justice Act 2002, the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005, and the Terrorism Act 2006), and new restrictions pertaining to stop and search powers in 2014, figures published by the Home Office for the period 2006/2007-2015/2016 reveal that the relationship between the police and certain minority 'racial' and/or ethnic groups has remained strained: 'Black people are over 6 times more likely to be stopped and searched than White people' and 'people from an ethnic minority background are 3 times more likely to be stopped and searched than White people' (Home Office Policing Statistics on Stop and Search 2017).

In terms of how contemporary British cinema has responded to such developments, only one coming-of-age film deals directly with rioting (*Bradford Riots* [2006]). However, significantly, it highlights the police's mishandling of protests by British Pakistani youth when the local mela is cancelled because of a National Front march, and this emphasis upon police bias in the face of 'racial' and/or ethnic tension is a salient feature of other titles with adolescent protagonists from a minority 'racial' and/or ethnic background – from the depiction of a police raid upon a gathering of young black people enjoying a reggae sound system (*Babylon* [1980]), to the positioning of police brutality as a catalyst for the awakening of 'black consciousness' (*Burning an Illusion* [1981]), and from the portrayal of 'racist' police in the 1970s (*Young Soul Rebels* [1991]), to the suggestion that the police are complicit with a government who are breeding creatures 'to kill black boys' (*Attack the Block* [2011]). In short, the relationship between the police and youth from a minority 'racial' and/or ethnic background is shown to be vexed.

Pertinently, too, some of the contemporary British coming-of-age films set in the past can be seen to excavate links between government policy, nationalism, and 'racism': one film following seven siblings as they try to negotiate both the challenges of adolescence, and the cultural differences between their Pakistani Muslim father and white British Roman Catholic mother, in the early 1970s, when Conservative MP for Wolverhampton South West Enoch Powell was trying to gather popular support for a policy of repatriation for African, Asian and West Indian people settled in Britain (*East is East* [1999]); one film recreating the

experiences of Irish Republican author Brendan Behan when he spent time in an English borstal after being captured whilst on an Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) mission in 1941 (*Borstal Boy* [2000]); and one film examining the way in which a resurgence of nationalist sentiment in the wake of the Falklands War of 1982 found expression in the National Front, and white nationalists and supremacists more generally, whose behaviour came to taint skinhead culture (*This is England* [2006]).

Finally, in the same vein as those films that consider how ‘an abandonment of the commitment to full employment’ (Hill 1999: 5), a heterosexist age of consent for homosexual activity, Section 28, ‘institutional racism’, and strains of nationalism have shaped the coming-of-age process for sections of Britain’s youth, some titles draw attention to failings in social services for young people and, in particular, the care system. One film written by David Leland as part of *Tales Out of School*, a quartet made for ITV in 1984 with the intention of interrogating ‘the structure and power of mass education’ (Collins 2011), concerns a school refuser who wishes to stay at home and care for her nephew, but finds herself subjected to a care order removing her to a Residential Assessment Centre and then a Secure Unit, with the long term aim of sending her to boarding school. And whilst the protagonist is not an especially sympathetic figure, she is, critically, figured as the victim of ‘racial’ prejudice and a general lack of respect and understanding on the part of the authorities (*R.H.I.N.O.* [1983]). Further to this, one film is based upon an alleged but disputed case of sexual abuse in a care home for boys in the early 1990s (Webster 2005), leading to the protagonist’s suicide as an adult when he is disbelieved in court (*Care* [2000]). And along similar lines, one film, which is a semi-autobiographical account of co-writer and director Samantha Morton’s past, concentrates upon its protagonist’s experience of being taken away from an unstable family life and placed in a children’s home where, among other problems, she witnesses her older roommate being sexually manipulated and exploited by one of the care workers on a regular basis – a pointed intertitle leaving the audience with statistics relating to children in care and on the ‘at risk’ register in Britain (*The Unloved* [2009]).

Overall, then, the contemporary British coming-of-age film constitutes a distinctive vehicle for exploring how certain policies of and laws passed by the various governments of the period have impacted upon Britain’s youth, specifically, in terms of employment, the rights of those identifying as LGBTQI, policing, the treatment of those from a minority ‘racial’ and/or ethnic background, foreign policy, social services, and the care system. And whilst this is not its exclusive function, since there is, as this thesis details, an internal logic to the coming-of-age genre – a range of conventions which stand outside of any social, political, economic and cultural concerns – it may be said that, in this regard, it possesses a decidedly sociological bent. Indeed, in the same way that Thomas L. Jeffers and Martin Swales observe of the English *Bildungsroman* that it bears an inclination to put a greater emphasis upon the challenges of socialisation than the German *Bildungsroman* and the American *Bildungsroman*, which, instead, champion the process of individualisation, so it

may be argued that the contemporary British coming-of-age film typically spells out how adolescence is a time of identity formation, whereby one's individualisation and socialisation is in part shaped by one's class, gender, 'race', ethnicity and sexuality. Moreover, although some contemporary British coming-of-age films intersect issues of class, etc. in ways that are overly contrived and rather didactic, others, as Hill (1999) and Dave (2006) have noted of contemporary British cinema more generally, deconstruct essentialising conceptions of class, etc.

In particular, some of the films set in the past position their protagonist as a progressive figure in a time of pronounced social change, echoing Mikhail Bakhtin's assertion that the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* 'reflects the historical emergence of the world itself': 'He is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other. This transition is accomplished in him and through him' (2006: 23). As Moretti declares: 'Youth is, so to speak, modernity's "essence", the sign of a world that seeks its meaning in the future rather than in the past' (2000: 5). For example, one title set in the early 1950s hints at the changing role of women in British society by situating teenage female sexuality and teenage single motherhood as a provocation to patriarchal notions of femininity (*Wish You Were Here* [1987]). And in the same vein, but set in the early 1960s, are those titles revolving around teenage girls who actively distance themselves from their housewife mothers by pursuing alternative interests and pleasures that embody the burgeoning second-wave feminism of the era (*Those Glory Glory Days* [1983], *An Education* [2009] and *Ginger and Rosa* [2012]). Also looking back at the 1960s are those films in which the adolescent growth of a second or third-generation immigrant is not merely set against, but emblematic of the increasingly diverse 'racial' and ethnic composition of Britain, specifically, locating him at the centre of 'racial' and/or ethnic tensions and/or cross-cultural encounters, and casting him as a symbol of reconciliation (*Wondrous Oblivion* [2003] and *Sixty Six* [2006]). And similarly, but within the context of the 1970s, are those films portraying friendship and intimacy between young people of differing 'racial' and/or ethnic backgrounds, in the face of everyday, familial and institutional discrimination (*Young Soul Rebels* [1991], *East is East* [1999] and *Anita and Me* [2002]).

Indeed, some of the films set in the past place their protagonists within developments and/or at events of national significance, intertwining the personal and the historical through a blend of fact and fiction. For instance, one title set in 1960 depicts the budding friendship between a second-generation Jewish boy, whose mother arrived on the *Kindertransport*, and his new Jamaican neighbours, who have come as part of a wave of West Indian immigration to Britain – using cricket as a plot device to unite the characters, notably, in the year in which the West Indian cricket team was captained by a black man for the first time (*Wondrous Oblivion* [2003]). And also set in the 1960s, following a boy of Jewish heritage, and using sport as a plot device, another title juxtaposes the Jewish ritual of the *bar mitzvah* with the only time that Britain has hosted the FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) World Cup – the boy's transformation into a 'son of

commandment' and England's victory over West Germany serving ultimately to strengthen a fraught father-son relationship (*Sixty Six* [2006]). Further foregrounding issues of 'race' and ethnicity, one title (inaccurately) puts its black British female protagonist at the heart of the Gregson versus Gilbert case of the 1781 Zong Massacre and, by extension, the establishment of Britain's anti-slavery movement in 1783 and the passing of the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act (Belle [2014]), whilst another title (more accurately) revisits the Queen's Silver Jubilee, and sets the National Front and 'institutional racism', against the Socialist Workers Party 'Stuff the Jubilee' campaign and the coming together of black soulboys and white punks (*Young Soul Rebels* [1991]). Meanwhile, on a different tack, the miners' strike of 1984-1985 forms the backdrop to: on the one hand, a boy's successful pursuit of a career as a ballet dancer – his trajectory, Hill (2004) and Leggott (2004) suggest, allegorical of Britain's transition from a heavy industries-based economy to a service-industries based economy (*Billy Elliot* [2000]); and on the other hand, the establishment of the LGSM (Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners) campaign, and their solidarity with a Welsh community of striking miners and their families, culminating in the enshrinement of gay and lesbian rights in the Labour Party's 1985 manifesto, thanks to a block vote from the NUM (National Union of Mineworkers) (*Pride* [2014]).

Further to this, whilst the question of how or, indeed, if the image of youth in British cinema has changed over time is in itself a complex topic due to the diversity of subject matter and style, it is suggested tentatively that drawing a line between representations appearing before and after 1979 is productive. For example, according to Hill (1986), the youth-centred titles of the British New Wave 1959-1963 may be divided usefully into two main types: the 'social problem film', in which the 'social problem' is customarily a young person who is eventually inducted into the parent culture; and examples of 'working-class realism', which introduced an important new dimension to British cinema in its project of social extension but, in its depiction of individual, as opposed to collective, solutions to structural inequities, essentially failed to challenge the existing class structure, and in its confinement of female characters to 'familiar domestic and marital roles', and 'punishment' of those daring to overturn expectation (Hill 1999: 174), did little for gender equality, despite claims otherwise. However, although such conservatism is still in evidence, and an interest in examining the routines, aspirations and frustrations of working-class youth remains, there have been some clear developments. There may continue to be a tendency to cast young people, especially (working-class) males in their mid- to late adolescence, as at odds with mainstream society. But whilst the social problem film invariably rehabilitates its delinquent and deviant protagonists, the majority of contemporary British coming-of-age films convey a healthy scepticism of the parent culture, which, in turn, serves to legitimise youthful 'rebellion' and 'resistance'. Consonantly, whilst those films influenced by British cinema's longstanding tradition of social or working-class realism share a political ambivalence manifesting itself in a dubious tendency to favour the exceptional and/or

fortunate individual over group solidarity, there is now, at least, a higher proportion of female protagonists.

To conclude, it is argued that isolating British coming-of-age films made from 1979 onwards is analytically fruitful. Firstly, a number of films may be said to respond to the politics of the time, exploring the impact of policies and laws upon, and the role of state institutions in the lives of young people. Secondly, such interest in the ways in which social policy shapes adolescence is part of a broader preoccupation within the body of work at hand – namely, a concern with how the factors of class, gender, ‘race’, ethnicity and sexuality affect individualisation and socialisation. Thirdly, whilst some films situate their protagonists as victims of social, political, economic and cultural developments, others – particularly those set in the past – position their protagonists as agents of renewal. And fourthly, there would appear to be, on balance, a greater sympathy with the younger generation in contemporary British cinema, than that shown prior to the period at hand – perhaps no surprise in light of the fact that British society has come to talk about youth differently, paying more attention to issues of child development, and increasingly sensitive to the needs and difficulties of young people, than ever before, with enhanced knowledge and understanding informing laws, policies, the education system, the health system, parenting, and so on. Thus, if the relationship between neoliberalism and the one hundred and seventy-eight films in question is somewhat elusive, due to the complex and imprecise nature of the former, and the variation in subject matter and style of the latter, it can be seen that there are, nevertheless, constructive links to be made.

Structure

In order to delineate systematically the origins and characteristics of the coming-of-age genre and its manifestation in contemporary British cinema, the thesis is presented in five chapters that move from the general (Chapters One and Two) to the specific (Chapters Three, Four and Five): (1) Contexts: Adolescence, the *Bildungsroman*, and the Relationship between Adolescence and Cinema; (2) Defining the Coming-of-Age Genre and its Specific Manifestation in Contemporary British Cinema; (3) Boyhood in Contemporary British Cinema; (4) Girlhood in Contemporary British Cinema; and (5) Minority Ethnic Adolescent Protagonists in Contemporary British Cinema. Chapter One contextualises the coming-of-age genre by surveying some of the most influential theories about adolescence, and key scholarship on, firstly, the literary precursor of the coming-of-age genre, the *Bildungsroman*, and secondly, the relationship between adolescence and cinema. Chapter Two seeks to define the coming-of-age genre and its specific manifestation within contemporary British cinema, examining how other scholars have employed the ‘coming-of-age film’ label, rationalising the use of the concept of genre, proposing a working definition of the coming-of-age genre, recognising the prevalence of generic hybridity in contemporary British coming-of-age films, and setting out the primary conventions of the contemporary British

coming-of-age film. Chapter Three focuses on some of the most prominent patterns within the stories of male adolescence in contemporary British cinema, specifically, tropes in the treatment of emerging sexuality (heterosexual and homosexual), the framing of the coming-of-age process within educational endeavours and professional pursuits, the three main types of trajectory in those films influenced by British cinema's longstanding tradition of social or working-class realism, and the way in which a number of narratives feature an older brother who is either set alongside the figure of the father or essentially fulfils the function ordinarily assumed by the father. Chapter Four turns to the tales of adolescent female experience in contemporary British cinema and concentrates upon the common configuration of the girl and the man, drawing attention to a play of victimhood and agency and, in particular, the role of class in, on one side, portrayals of sexual abuse and exploitation, and on the other side, depictions of consensual relationships. And under the categories of black British males in the 1980s and 1990s, black British males in the 2000s and 2010s, British Asian males, Jewish British Males, other minority ethnic males, black British females, and British Asian females, Chapter Five identifies the central ways in which contemporary British coming-of-age films with protagonists from a minority 'racial' and/or ethnic background explore how issues of 'race' and ethnicity shape adolescent growth, especially in terms of the experience of 'racial' and/or ethnic discrimination, and the negotiation of cultural differences.

Whilst separating films with protagonists from a minority 'racial' and/or ethnic background, from films about 'boyhood' and 'girlhood' more generally, runs the risk of naturalising the experiences of those protagonists who are not from a minority 'racial' and/or ethnic background as unmarked, the pairing of issues of 'race' and ethnicity with the image of youth has been a feature of British cinema since the 1950s and it therefore makes sense to situate contemporary representations of first, second and third-generation immigrants within this trend. Furthermore, in dividing up the films according to the sex of the protagonists, not only chapter-wise, but also within one of the chapters, there is a danger of obscuring important similarities between the boy-centred and girl-centred narratives. However, such modes of classification align with the sociological inclination of the contemporary British coming-of-age film, facilitating a methodical examination of the ways in which it serves as a vehicle for the dramatisation of social, political, economic and cultural issues in a time of pronounced change.

Chapter One

Contexts: Adolescence, the *Bildungsroman*, and the Relationship between Adolescence and Cinema

Introduction

In setting out to define the coming-of-age genre and appreciate its specific manifestation in contemporary British cinema, the discussion is enriched considerably by three initial areas of enquiry. Firstly, an examination of some of the most influential theories about adolescence presents an introduction to the basic subject matter of the coming-of-age genre, revealing how the stage of life at hand is mainly a socio-cultural construct. Secondly, an exploration of scholarship on the literary precursor of the coming-of-age film, the *Bildungsroman*, provides an insight into the origins and nature of the coming-of-age genre. And thirdly, a consideration of scholarship on the relationship between adolescence and cinema details the on-screen treatment of adolescence and targeting of adolescent audiences, chiefly within the context of American cinema, helping to illuminate the climate in which the coming-of-age genre has come into existence. Indeed, if adolescence is largely a socio-cultural construct, the *Bildungsroman* is its chief manifestation in literary form, and cinematic representations of adolescence follow on. Thus it is productive to set these topics alongside one another.

Scholarship on Adolescence

Now commonly regarded as a distinct stage of human life beginning with the onset of puberty and characterised by a state of semi-dependency in relation to parents and other adults, the transition from childhood to adulthood has long been a subject of interest for philosophers, poets, playwrights, novelists, educationalists and the like. However, it is G. Stanley Hall who is credited with the first significant attempt to produce a definitive account of its qualities. According to Rolf E. Muuss, ‘adolescence was not considered a separate stage of human development and received no special emphasis’ until the arrival of Hall’s two-volume *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* (1904) (1988: 3). And similarly, John Springhall argues that Hall’s transformation of ‘earlier ideas of “youth”’ ‘created almost singlehandedly ... the modern concept of adolescence’, with his expansive study read widely on both sides of the Atlantic, and the abbreviated *Youth: Its Education, Regimen and Hygiene* (1906) doing ‘much to popularise the use of “adolescence” in everyday language’ (1986: 28). More specifically, prior to Hall, Aristotle had divided the first twenty-one years of a male human

being's life into three stages and named the period between the age of fourteen and the age of twenty-one 'young manhood', and this formulation had been 'generally accepted during the Middle Ages and recurs in some modern theories of development' (Muuss 1988: 7). Likewise, in spite of the regressive homunculus concept promoted by some seventeenth-century scientists (Muuss 1988: 10-11), the eighteenth century saw Jean Jacques Rousseau revolutionise thought concerning the nature of child development and its educational implications, proposing four stages as opposed to three, with the period between the age of twelve and the age of fifteen 'characterized by an awakening of the rational functions, including reason and self-consciousness' and 'an enormous amount of physical energy and strength', and the period between the age of fifteen and the age of twenty, labelled 'adolescence proper', a time which 'brings about a change from selfishness to self-esteem and social consideration'⁶ (Muuss 1988: 18-19). Nevertheless, no one focused on adolescence to the level that Hall did and, whilst one of his central claims – namely, that 'every developing adolescent recapitulated the cultural history of the human race in the stages of his or her own physical and mental growth: savagery, barbarism and civilisation' – has been discredited because of its reliance 'on the now outmoded principle of recapitulation' (Springhall 1986: 30), his view of the adolescent experience as a time of *Sturm und Drang*, specifically, in the form of 'antithetical impulses of Promethean enthusiasm and deep sentimental *Weltschmerz*' (Muuss 1988: 23), remains highly influential:

'Energy, exaltation and supernatural activity are followed by indifference, lethargy and loathing. Exuberant gaiety, laughter, and euphoria make place for dysphoria, depressive gloom, and melancholy. Egoism, vanity, and conceit are just as characteristic of this period of life as are abasement, humiliation, and bashfulness. One can observe both the remnants of an uninhibited childish selfishness and increasing idealistic altruism. Goodness and virtue are never so pure, but never again does temptation so forcefully preoccupy thought. Adolescents want solitude and seclusion, while finding themselves entangled in crushes and friendships. Never again does the peer group have such a strong influence. At one time the adolescent may exhibit exquisite sensitivity and tenderness; at another time, callousness and cruelty. Apathy and inertia vacillate with an enthusiastic curiosity, an urge to discover and explore. There is a yearning for idols and authority that does not exclude a revolutionary radicalism directed against any kind of authority' (Muuss 1988: 22-23).

In comparison, the psychoanalyst Harry Stack Sullivan constructed a rather more sympathetic take on adolescence, basing his theory upon the idea that '[i]nterpersonal relationships are the essential ingredients for normal human development', and that 'their destructive, anxiety-rousing manifestations provide explanations for immaturity, deviance, and psychopathology' (Muuss 1988: 114) – coining the term 'self-system':

'Our sense of self is shaped by the manner in which "significant others" – people who are directly influential in our lives – see us and treat us. The self is first and foremost a social self, formed by others; in turn, the self becomes the instigator of social relationships. The self-system organizes life

⁶ The first four or five years constitute infancy and are called the 'animal stage', and the period between the age of five and the age of twelve is named the 'savage stage' (Muuss 1988: 17).

experiences within the personality... [and] constitutes a very important part of personality, particularly important in fending off anxiety' (Muuss 1988: 116).

More precisely, Sullivan pinpointed adolescence as a singularly decisive phase in the evolution of a person's 'self-system': 'The importance of the juvenile era can scarcely be exaggerated, since it is the actual time for becoming social' (Sullivan 1953: 227 cited in Muuss 1988: 126). That is, this period sees 'a divestment of energy from certain relationships (parents and family) and a reinvestment in new social relationships (chums and friends)' (Muuss 1988: 118), and this introduces a certain vulnerability into the life of an adolescent – in the main, 'the threat of ostracism' (Muuss 1988: 126) – and thus makes the effective management of relationships vital to well-being. For example, the common formation of 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' has the potential to engender feelings of either acceptance and cooperation, or exclusion and isolation, and this inevitably impacts upon an adolescent's sense of self:

'[E]ffective and meaningful peer relationships, especially during adolescence, are essential prerequisites for healthy and psychosocial development. ... '[P]oor peer relationships contribute to poor mental health and depression. Furthermore, they are associated with delinquent behaviour, poor school achievement, dropping out of school, running away from home, drug use, early sexual behaviour, mental illness, and behaviour disorder' (Muuss 1988: 114).

Analogously, Erik Erikson, a psychoanalyst who divided human development into eight stages, also drew a great deal of attention to adolescence – which was to him the fifth stage and applicable to those between the age of twelve and eighteen – modifying and expanding Sigmund Freud's theory of psychosexual development by shifting from an emphasis on sexuality to an emphasis on identity, and holding up identity formation as the hallmark of adolescence (Muuss 1988: 52-65). More specifically, defining adolescence as 'the period in the human life cycle during which the individual must establish a *sense of personal identity* and avoid the dangers of *role diffusion* and *identity confusion* (Muuss 1988: 60), Erikson underscored the importance of 'the acquisition of an ego-identity' and the dangers of an 'identity crisis' (Muuss 1988: 53). And maintaining that 'identity is never "established" as an "achievement" in the form of a personality armor, or of anything static and unchangeable' (Erikson 1968: 24 cited in Muuss 1988: 55), but is a 'forever to-be-revised sense of reality of the Self within social reality' (Erikson 1968: 211 cited in Muuss 1988: 55), he posited that identity issues re-emerge when one experiences a major role change – for instance, getting a new job, getting married, having a child, etc. – and that '[t]he ability to cope with identity issues that result from changes in one's role in life may well depend on the degree of success with which the adolescent identity was mastered' (Muuss 1988: 55):

'If the conflict is worked out in a constructive, satisfactory manner, the positive quality becomes part of the ego and further healthy development is enhanced. However, if the conflict persists or is resolved unsatisfactorily, the negative quality is incorporated into the personality structure. In that case the negative quality will interfere with further development' (Muuss 1988: 53).

In addition, Erikson thought of adolescence as ‘a *psychosocial moratorium*’ (1994: 156) – ‘an “as-if” period when individuals can experiment with different roles “as if” they were committed to these roles’ but are ‘not held fully accountable for errors that might be made in trying out new roles’ – believing that if adolescents

‘have sufficient opportunity to search, experiment, play the field, and try on different roles, there is a very good chance that they will find themselves, develop an identity, and emerge with commitments to politics, religion, a vocational goal, and a more clearly defined sex role and sexual preference’ (Muuss 1988: 72).

And relatedly, the anthropologist Margaret Mead advanced the outlook that ‘in [Western] society’s emphasis on success, progress, and production ... we exert too much pressure on our youth and in the process deprive them of the opportunity to experience a moratorium, an “as-if” period, without the pressure for accountability’ (Muuss 1988: 73). Detailing in her controversial but potent *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), for example, how young people on the island of Ta’u were able to experiment sexually without fear of disapproval or retribution, or were able to easily move in with relatives if their relationship with their parents became too fraught, Mead propounded that Western, primarily American, society was too prudish and rigid when it came to adult expectations of adolescents – pondering, in her first chapter,

‘the anthropologist listened to the current comment upon adolescence. He heard attitudes which seemed to him dependent upon social environment – such as rebellion against authority, philosophical perplexities, the flowering of idealism, conflict and struggle – ascribed to a period of physical development. And on the basis of his knowledge of the determinism of culture, of the plasticity of human beings, he doubted. Were these difficulties due to being adolescent or to being adolescent in America?’ (1978: 12);

and concluding, in her final chapter, ‘adolescence is not necessarily a time of strain and stress, but ... cultural conditions make it so’ (1978: 187).

Indeed, Mead is not the only anthropologist to show an interest in adolescence, and there is, in particular, substantial research pertaining to coming-of-age rituals in small-scale societies outside Europe. Arnold van Gennep coined the term ‘rites of passage’ in his 1909 book of the same name, grappling with the transition from childhood to adulthood by applying a framework that he applied to all societal rituals – three distinguishable, consecutive phases that he described as ‘separation from a previous world’, a ‘transitional stage’, and ‘incorporation into a new world’ (2010: 21). That is, movement from childhood to adulthood is ‘akin to a bodily movement through space’, ‘like journeying across an international border or walking through a doorway’ (Grimes 2000: 103), and sometimes literal passage is required. For instance, in some societies:

‘Young people are: (1) taken from a village and their mothers (separation); (2) sequestered in some cordoned-off-place, where they suffer ordeals as initiates and receive sacred knowledge (transition); and (3) finally returned, now men, to their villages in order to assume the role of adult (incorporation)’ (Grimes 2000: 104).

Further to this, Victor Turner took van Gennep's notion of a 'transitional stage' (van Gennep 2010: 21) and advanced it considerably, claiming that such 'liminality' (Turner 1970) – a concept akin to Erikson and Mead's notion of 'a psychological moratorium' – temporarily extricates a participant from their social status, thereby invites experimentation and new possibilities, and is, therefore, the key to transformation. And significantly, too, Bruce Lincoln challenged van Gennep's bias towards male initiation, reflecting that female initiation does not tend to involve spatial change, but is, in fact, more likely to involve 'enclosure, metamorphosis (or magnification) and emergence' (Lincoln 1981: 101): 'Women, it seems, are less likely to be sequestered in the bush than to be enclosed in a circumscribed domestic space' (Grimes 2000: 104).

In a different mode to the psychoanalytic schemes of Sullivan and Erikson, and the anthropological accounts of Mead, van Gennep, Turner, and Lincoln, Springhall's historical enquiry into the transition from childhood to adulthood focuses on the British picture and proposes that "adolescence" is more than just a psycho-biological experience, it is also a cultural definition and role for an age category and a product of a particular set of historical circumstances' (1986: 8). Within the context of British history, he asserts, whilst 'the early modernists ... claim it as a constant feature', as likely to be found in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the eighteenth and nineteenth, there is much to suggest that '[t]he abolition of child labour, the introduction of compulsory education, the progressive raising of the school-leaving age and the advent of a teenage market for leisure, are all seen as ushering in the concept of adolescence over the last hundred years' (1986: 8).

For example, Springhall reveals that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a form of adolescence was the experience of leaving home in order to work as an apprentice or servant in another household (1986: 16), with the majority making the move at some point between the age of twelve and the age of seventeen (1986: 19). And whether one became an apprentice or a servant depended on the social standing of one's family – sixteenth-century apprentices coming mostly from settled and wealthy families, since most guilds stipulated that an apprentice's father was either a freeholder or of free status; seventeenth-century apprentices 'drawn from all levels of society but the gentleman apprentice of a prominent East India merchant and the pauper or orphan apprentice of a humble shoemaker ... as far apart socially as their masters' (Springhall 1986: 17); and around sixty per cent of fifteen to twenty-four-year-olds classified as 'servants' of one kind or another, with girls engaged in domestic work, and boys, all branches of husbandry (Springhall 1986: 19-20). Thus it may be posited that

'for those boys and girls who left home at any time after the age of twelve, apprenticeship or service would act almost as a "rite of passage" separating them from the lives of their childhood, a transitional stage which was meant to prepare them for adulthood and citizenship' (Springhall 1986: 17).

What is more, Springhall explains that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw what may best be described as ‘the institutionalisation of adolescence’, with the mid-Victorian reform of English public schools – most commonly associated with Dr Thomas Arnold’s tenure as headmaster at Rugby – conspiring to create ‘a separate adolescent way of life’ (1986: 25-27). Hence, just as sixteenth and seventeenth-century apprenticeship and servitude usually ended at the age of twenty-four, helping to create a distinction between adolescence and adulthood, so developments in the provision of education, especially for the middle classes, intensified the differentiation of different life stages. In fact, it is arguable that the burgeoning public school system was inextricably bound up with the ruling class’s desire for Britain to remain competitive in the world by being at the forefront of manufacture, with an enthusiasm for policies of imperialism reaching a high point in the 1880s and 1890s:

‘It is well known ... that the English public schools of this generation were able to call on a patriotic devotion to duty and service among middle and upper-class youth ... to help staff colonial outposts and military cantonments in the far corners of the British Empire’ (Springhall 1986: 38).

By contrast, it took a long time for the introduction of compulsory schooling to include the adolescent years – Springhall noting that the ‘disparity between ... the different social classes of late Victorian and Edwardian British society was most clearly demarcated at the level of educational opportunity’, with the working-class adolescent rarely in school after the age of thirteen or fourteen, and often working part-time before it was time to leave (1986: 46-47). The Elementary Education Act 1870 may have introduced a framework for the education of all five to thirteen-year-olds, but enforcement was uneven⁷ and the gradual raising of the official school-leaving age was slow – eleven in 1893, twelve in 1899, fourteen in 1921, fifteen in 1936, and sixteen in 1973 (Gillard 2011). Nevertheless, it is clear that British adolescence has come to be more sharply defined by the evolution of educational provision.

Further to this, no history of British adolescence is complete without mention of the ‘teenager’ – ‘a market research term imported from America for young people with money to spend’ and ‘a symbol worshipped by record companies, clothing manufacturers and concert promoters with equal greed’ (Springhall 1986: 216):

‘The post-war improvement in the standard of living among all age groups, and especially in the working classes, has meant that more money is generally available for uncommitted spending. ... Today as never before much advertising is addressed specifically to teenagers and to teenagers as teenagers (as members of a named and defined group). They therefore acquire a sense of their own economic importance and independence’ (Albermarle Report on the Youth Service in England and Wales 1960: 23-24).

⁷ It is important to note that until the Elementary Education Act 1880 tightened up attendance laws, enforcement was left to school boards, and that it was only with the Elementary Education Act 1891 that elementary education was made free (Gillard 2011).

Allegedly created by consumerism and mass production, leading to accusations of philistinism and superficiality, and associated with delinquency, sexual immorality, and violence, resulting in ‘moral panics’ (Hill 1986: 10-16), ‘teenagers’ were a fabrication of, primarily, the 1950s – supposedly ‘discovered in small flocks around the country by 1956, the year Elvis Presley released the record of “Heartbreak Hotel”, rock ‘n’ roll riots took place in the cinemas and Prime Minister Anthony Eden launched the Suez invasion’ (Springhall 1986: 215). Correspondingly, the *British National Bibliography* shows that whilst 1950-1954 saw just a single book with the word ‘teenage’ in its title, 1955-1959 saw six, and 1960-1964 saw fourteen (Springhall 1986: 215). Before the arrival of the ‘teenager’, British adolescents had emulated their elders in their dress, behaviour and, arguably, attitudes, beliefs, and values too. But with the marketing of fashion, music, cinema, magazines, cosmetics and soft drinks to this new demographic, adolescence came of age.

In a similar vein to Springhall’s work on adolescence, the annual journal of the University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies⁸ looks at the consolidation of Britain’s post-war ‘youth culture’ (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts 2006: 3), pinpointing five main contributory factors. Firstly, “‘affluence’” brought about ‘the increased importance of the market and consumption’, and this enabled ‘the growth of “Youth-oriented” leisure industries’ (Clarke et al. 2006: 11). Secondly, ‘the arrival of mass communications, mass entertainment, mass art and mass culture’ allowed for “‘imitation” and “manipulation”” (Clarke et al. 2006: 11) on an unprecedented scale. Thirdly, the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki spawned a ‘qualitative difference between the pre- and post-war generations’ (Clarke et al. 2006: 12). Fourthly, burgeoning educational provision ‘creat[ed] the pre-conditions for the emergence of a specifically “adolescent society”’ (Clarke et al. 2006: 13). And fifthly, ‘the arrival of ... distinctive styles in dress and rock-music cemented any doubts anyone may have had about a “unique” younger generation’ (Clarke et al. 2006: 13). The overlaps with Springhall’s thesis are clear to see.

Furthermore, alongside the different theories, it is imperative to consider juridical factors in the composition of adolescence, not least because, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘to come of age’ means ‘to reach full development or maturity’ or ‘to attain adult age and status’, with ‘of age’ defined as ‘at the age at which one has an adult’s legal rights and obligations’ and ‘nonage’ defined as ‘the state of being under full legal age; minority; youth; an early stage in the growth or development of something’. Crucially, the legal age at which a society allows its citizens suffrage, or to have sex, get married, drive a car, purchase alcohol and tobacco, join the military and so on, is an indication of what a society deems to be ‘adult’. For instance, in England, the age of consent for heterosexuals was set at twelve in 1275, raised to thirteen in 1875, and hiked to sixteen in 1885. And in Britain, a citizen may become a soldier at the age of sixteen, drive a car at seventeen, and

⁸ The University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies was founded in 1964, and was essentially closed down in 2002 when ‘restructuring’ led to a merger with the Department of Sociology.

purchase alcohol and tobacco and vote in general and local elections at eighteen⁹. However, in spite of general agreement that ‘adolescence’ denotes the transition from childhood to adulthood, the age of majority varies considerably from country to country¹⁰, and juxtaposing various suggested definitions reveals that there is no universal consensus as to what counts as the adolescent years. For example, the World Health Organisation (WHO) classifies an adolescent as a person aged between 10 and 19 (WHO website, 2015), but the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states:

‘In many societies ... adolescence is narrowly equated with puberty and the cycle of physical changes culminating in reproductive maturity. In other societies adolescence is understood in broader terms that encompass psychological, social, and moral terrain, as well as the strictly physical aspects of maturation. In these societies the term adolescence typically refers to the period between ages 12 and 20 and is roughly equivalent to the word teens’ (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* website, 2013).

Moreover, according to Laurence Steinberg:

‘Adolescence has changed since most of today’s parents were teenagers. Once limited to the years from roughly 13 to 18, adolescence – at least as a psychological stage – now begins as early as 10 (because puberty occurs earlier than in previous eras) and extends into the mid-20s (because individuals remain financially dependent on their parents much longer’ (2011: 7).

Indeed, as even a cursory Internet search demonstrates, the view that adolescence lasts until about the age of twenty-five is gaining credence, with, for instance, recent research into brain activity corresponding with ‘[t]he adolescent desires of sensation-seeking and novelty’ leading psychologist Beatriz Luna to conclude that the age at which people ‘cross[] the threshold of adulthood’ is ‘probably closer to 25’ than 15 (Tuftt 2015), and the BBC reporting, in 2013, that British child psychologists were being given ‘a new directive’ stipulating that the age range with which they should be working is no longer 0-18 but 0-25:

‘There are three stages of adolescence – early adolescence from 12-14 years, middle adolescence from 15-17 years, and late adolescence from 18 years and over. Neuroscience has shown that a young person’s cognitive development continues into this later stage and that their emotional maturity, self-image and judgement will be affected until the prefrontal cortex of the brain has fully developed’ (BBC News website, 2013).¹¹

Naturally, any conception of adolescence is inseparable from debate concerning the parameters of adulthood, and here, too, opinions are shifting. For example, Jeffrey Jensen

⁹ An exception to this is that sixteen and seventeen-year-olds were entitled to vote in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum.

¹⁰ The ‘age of majority’ is the age at which one is legally considered an adult. It should not be confused with the age at which one is allowed suffrage, or to have sex, get married, drive a car, purchase alcohol and tobacco, join the military and so on.

¹¹ It is also worth noting that

‘As of April 2014, local authorities will be legally obliged to support every young person who wants to stay in foster care until their 21st birthday. ... Prior to [this], young people were only supported to live with foster families until their 18th birthday. Campaigners argued, however, that looked-after children should be afforded the same treatment as their peers – many of whom continue to live at home well into their 20s – rather than face being forced to leave care at 18’ (CommunityCare website, 2013).

Arnett talks of 'emerging adulthood as distinct from both the adolescence that precedes it and the young adulthood that comes in its wake':

'Rather than marrying and becoming parents in their early twenties, most people in industrialised societies now postpone these rites of passage until at least their late twenties, spending these years in self-focused exploration as they try out different possibilities in their careers and relationships' (2004: back cover).

However, this description of 'emerging adulthood' is practically identical to Anthony Giddens and Philip W. Sutton's account of 'young adulthood':

'Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, sociologists began to theorize a new phrase within the life course in developed societies which as can call young adulthood ... Young adulthood is said to characterize people from around eighteen to the mid-thirties, who live quite independent lives but have not yet married or had children and, as a consequence, are still experimenting with relationships and lifestyles' (2013: 352).

Thus it can be seen that, as with adolescence, adulthood is more than a certain level of physiological development. Co-editor of the *Oxford Ritual Studies Series* Ronald L. Grimes may be correct to claim that:

'Although in the West there is passage into adulthood, there are few, if any, explicit, effective rites of passage to demarcate it. Certainly, there is no nation- or culturewide initiation, only a motley array of activities such as beginning menstruation, getting a driver's license, reaching drinking age, graduating, moving away from the parental home, or earning an income' (2000: 94).

Yet the words of Arnett, and Giddens and Sutton indicate that in spite of a lack of established rituals, the markers of adulthood are fairly well-entrenched. Gaining and maintaining regular, paid work; moving out of the family home; getting married; and having children – these may not be all and end-all when it comes to a modern-day, Western conception of adulthood but, by and large, they do seem to be regarded as distinguishing traits of 'being a grown-up'.

On a final note, sociological work provides another significant take on adolescence, emphasising how socialisation – 'the process whereby the helpless human infant gradually becomes a self-aware, knowledgeable person, skilled in the ways of the culture into which he or she was born' (Giddens and Sutton 2013: 335) – 'occurs in infancy and childhood', but also 'takes place later in childhood and into maturity' (Giddens and Sutton 2013: 339). That is, '[p]rimary socialization' may be 'the most intense period of cultural learning', with 'language and the basic behavioural patterns' acquired, and 'family ...[as] the main agent of socialization during this phase', but '[s]econdary socialization' sees '[s]chools, peer groups, organizations, the media, and eventually, the workplace become socializing forces for individuals' (Giddens and Sutton 2013: 339). Indeed, although '[s]ince the early 1990s, a new paradigm – often called the new sociology of childhood' – has 'signalled a shift away from theories which saw children as merely "becoming" skilled, knowledgeable members of society', towards a stance which views children as 'active participants or "beings" in their

own right, who interpret and construct their own lives, cultures and relationships' (Giddens and Sutton 2013: 348), the aforementioned '[a]gencies of socialization' (Giddens and Sutton 2013: 339) continue to be a principal factor in any research pertaining to childhood and adolescence. For instance, as the aforementioned University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies points out, 'it is not unusual for children to oppose, reject or reinterpret the information, norms and values they are taught and for peer groups to form subcultures, or even counter-cultures, in opposition to mainstream culture' (Giddens and Sutton 2013: 339).

A survey of anthropological, biological, historical, juridical, psychoanalytic, psychological and sociological approaches to adolescence shows, then, that it is largely a socio-cultural construct. The advent of puberty is, of course, central to the experience: bodily changes, sexual desire, and sexual experimentation are fundamental features of the adolescent years. However, if one is to pursue a truly comprehensive knowledge and understanding of adolescence, it is imperative that one appreciates the multifarious ways in which human beings have created it.

Scholarship on the *Bildungsroman*

As Tobias Boes states, the designation '*Bildungsroman*' is 'one of the most vexing, but also one of the most fruitful contributions that German letters have made to the international vocabulary of literary studies' (2006: 230). Despite some Germanists decrying its export to foreign cultures (Kontje 1993: 111), even a cursory reading of relevant scholarship reveals that it is still very much in circulation and that there have been manifold attempts to define it. For example, whilst Hartmut Steinecke avows the term so 'intellectually laden with interpretations from the past' that he proposes it be replaced with '*Individualroman* (individual-novel)' (1991: 94), Franco Moretti asserts that 'other possible generic labels' are 'novel of formation' (2000: 15) and 'novel of socialization' (2000: 247)¹². And although Jerome Hamilton Buckley acknowledges three German variations upon the *Bildungsroman* – the *Entwicklungsroman*, the *Erziehungsroman*, and the *Künstlerroman*¹³ – he chooses to stick with the *Bildungsroman* handle on the grounds that it is 'a convenient synonym for the novel of youth or apprenticeship' (1974: 13).

Lying behind this dispute is considerable debate as to what exactly a *Bildungsroman* is. In *Poetry and Experience* (1906), for instance, Wilhelm Dilthey avers that the theme of the *Bildungsroman* is the history of a young man who

¹² At one point, Moretti also brings the labels 'novel of ... initiation' and 'novel of ... education' into play, but he does not seem to put these terms on an equal footing with 'novel of formation' (2000: 15) or 'novel of socialization' (2000: 247).

¹³ According to Buckley, the *Entwicklungsroman* is 'a chronicle of a young man's growth rather than his specific quest for self-culture', the *Erziehungsroman* places 'an emphasis on the youth's training and formal education', and the *Künstlerroman* is 'a tale of the orientation of an artist' (1974: 13).

‘enters into life in a blissful state of ignorance, seeks related souls, experiences friendship and love, struggles with the hard realities of the world and thus armed with a variety of experiences, matures, finds himself and his mission in the world’ (Dilthey cited in Hardin 1991: xiv).

However, whilst oft-quoted, there have been a number of challenges to this formulation, and not least because of its insistence on a male protagonist. Todd Kontje, for example, has highlighted its noticeably conventional quality:

‘The hero of the classical *Bildungsroman*, as Dilthey defines it, engages in the double task of self-integration and integration into society. Under ideal conditions, the first implies the second: the mature hero becomes a useful and satisfied citizen. Viewed in this way, the *Bildungsroman* is a fundamentally conservative genre, confident in the validity of the society it depicts, and anxious to lead both hero and reader toward a productive place within that world’ (1992: 12).

Likewise, Moretti argues that ‘a dilemma conterminous with modern bourgeois civilization’ – ‘the conflict between the ideal of self-determination and the equally imperious demands of socialization’ (2000: 15) – lies at the heart of the European *Bildungsroman*, putting emphasis upon the way in which the narratives of the European *Bildungsroman* ‘typically seek symbolically to integrate modern processes of socialisation and individualisation’ (Dave 2013: 748), whilst also recognising the need for a distinction between the ‘classical’ *Bildungsroman*, the ‘new’ or ‘realistic’ *Bildungsroman*¹⁴, and the ‘late’ *Bildungsroman*: ‘classical’ used ‘to distinguish the narrative model created by Goethe and Austen from the *Bildungsroman* genre as a whole’ (Moretti 2000: 247); ‘new’ or ‘realistic’ used to denote later works which feel markedly ambivalent or pessimistic; and ‘late’ used to signify examples which register the impact of the First World War.

More specifically, when it comes to the European *Bildungsroman* of 1795-1898, Moretti borrows from Yuri Lotman’s conceptualisation of ‘two principles of textual organization – the “classification” principle and the “transformation” principle’:

‘When classification is strongest ... narrative transformations have meaning in so far as they lead to a particularly marked ending: one that establishes a classification different from the initial one but nonetheless perfectly clear and stable[.] ... Under the transformation principle ... the opposite is true: what makes a story meaningful is its narrativity, its being an open-ended process. Meaning is the result of not of a fulfilled teleology, but rather, ... the total rejection of such a solution’ (Moretti 2000: 7).

Importantly, too, these categories may be aligned with ‘opposite attitudes towards modernity’ (Moretti 2000: 8), of which ‘[y]outh is ...[the] ... “essence”’ (Moretti 2000: 5):

¹⁴ Please note that Moretti does not explicitly label a European *Bildungsroman* that is not ‘classical’ or ‘late’, ‘new’ or ‘realistic’. However, at the beginning of his chapter on Stendhal and Alexander Pushkin, he cites works in which ‘[i]ndividual autonomy and social integration are ... no longer the two aspects of a single course, as in the classical *Bildungsroman*, but incompatible choices’, and then asks, ‘Which shall be the more significant for the *new Bildungsroman*?’ (2000: 80 my emphasis), drawing the chapter to a close by stating that ‘bad faith ... is not only a theme of the *realistic Bildungsroman* but also its objective result’ (2000: 127 my emphasis).

‘Where the classification principle prevails ... youth is subordinated to the idea of “maturity”: like the story, it has meaning only in so far as it leads to a stable and “final” identity. Where the transformation principle prevails and youthful dynamism is emphasized ... youth cannot or does not want to give way to maturity: the young hero senses in fact in such a “conclusion” a sort of betrayal, which would deprive his youth of its meaning rather than enrich it’ (Moretti 2000: 8).

On the one hand, then, there is ‘the novel of marriage, seen as the definitive and classifying act par excellence’ (Moretti 2000: 7), and on the other hand, there is ‘the novel of adultery ... an existence devoted to instability’ (Moretti 2000: 8) – and crucially, the ‘late’ *Bildungsroman*, 1898-1914, may be said to, in effect, mark ‘the disappearance of the novel of youth’ (Moretti 2000: 229):

‘Moretti puts a new face on the old argument that the broadly diachronic and evolutionary *Bildungsroman* gives way to a more fragmentary and synchronic ... form of narrative during the early twentieth century. Moretti identifies the First World War as a pivotal event because the trauma of the trenches precludes a peaceful development into maturity and social acceptance. Youth is cut short, meaning remains enigmatic. In the light of such experiential adversity, Moretti claims, the modernists abandoned their prior tinkering with novels of formation and moved towards literary structures built around narrative “satellites”: inherently meaningless episodes which cannot be strung together into an accretive chain’ (Boes 2006: 238).

Opinions surrounding Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s 1795 novel, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, are key to the discussion. Dilthey pronounced it the prototype of the *Bildungsroman*, and this assertion is frequently parroted. But in defiance of this definition, Steinecke claims that ‘Goethe ... built in warnings about our taking the book to be a description of a successful formation of one’s personality’ – caveats which Friedrich Schlegel calls the ‘irony that hovers over the entire work’ (Steinecke 1991: 73) – and equally, Andrew Crumey says that

‘while the novel is billed as the classic coming-of-age tale, or *Bildungsroman*, it’s far more than that: a story of education and disillusionment, a novel of ideas ranging across literature, philosophy and politics, a masterpiece that resists all pigeonholing’ (2008).

Relatedly, Jeffrey L. Sammons posits that in the context of the twentieth century, several Romantic novels typically classed as *Bildungsromane* are ‘more clearly grasped as anti-*Bildungsromane*’ (1991: 32), and concluding that the nineteenth century brought only ‘maybe two and a half other examples’ in the *Wilhelm Meister* tradition, goes so far as to speak of a ‘phantom genre’ (Sammons 1981 cited in Steinecke 1991: 70-71):

‘[E]ven in the supposed heyday of the genre’, ‘[i]n novel after novel protagonists fail to mature into self-confident, autonomous individuals; the expected integration into an affirmed society yields to alienation from an unacceptable reality’ (Kontje 1992: 13).

Interestingly, too, one of Goethe’s contemporaries, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, satirises the *Bildungsroman* in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*: ‘in the end he usually gets his girl and some sort of job, gets married and becomes a Philistine just like the others’ (Hegel 1955: 568 cited in Kontje 1992: 14). And rather controversially, Dilthey’s claims about the *Bildungsroman*

and *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* have been linked to the establishment of the German Reich: 'the comprehensive discipline of *Germanistik*, the study, reinforcement, and transmission of the presumed cultural values of the nation'; 'a recanonization, in which Goethe and the Romantics were made the axis of cultural tradition ... , with the effect of consigning a large part of the literary life of the nineteenth century to relative oblivion'; and 'intense nationalistic and ideological pressures, with the aim of demonstrating a German cultural *Sonderweg* that was not only different from but in some ways superior to the foreign cultural developments in both West and East' (Sammons 1991: 28-29).

In response to the division between what one might call 'hardliners' and 'widerangers' – between those who regard the *Bildungsroman* as a peculiarly German type of novel from a particular period of time, and those who see it as an art form which has evolved and is modified by each new example – numerous scholars have put forward definitions that are more inclusive than exclusive in nature. The well-regarded M. H. Abrams may, in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (1993), settle on a tempered version of Dilthey's offering:

'The subject of [the *Bildungsroman*] is the development of the protagonist's mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences – and often through a spiritual crisis – into maturity and the recognition of his or her identity and role in the world' (1993: 132).

However, Sammons is much bolder:

'I think that the *Bildungsroman* should have something to do with *Bildung*, that is, with the early bourgeois, humanistic concept of the shaping of the individual self from its innate potentialities through acculturation and social experience to the threshold of maturity. ... It does not much matter whether the process of *Bildung* succeeds or fails, whether the protagonist achieves an accommodation with life and society or not. Thus the anti-*Bildungsromane* of the Romantics and the parodistic *Bildungsromane* of modern literature from Thomas Mann through Günter Grass may be located in the generic sequence' (1991: 41).

Basically, 'there must be a sense of evolutionary change within the self, a teleology of individuality, even if the novel, as many do, comes to doubt or deny the possibility of achieving a gratifying result' (Sammons 1991: 41).

Perhaps one of the most outstanding contributions to the topic comes from Mikhail Bakhtin, for just as Abrams draws a line between the 'novel of incident' and the 'novel of character'/'psychological novel', with the former characterised by 'interest ... in what the protagonist will do next and how the story will turn out', and the latter focused 'on the protagonist's motive for what he or she does, and on how the protagonist as a person will turn out' (1993: 131), Bakhtin contrasts the 'vast majority of novels', which 'know only the image of the ready-made hero', with the *Bildungsroman* and its 'image of man in the process of becoming' (2006: 19-20). In his essay entitled 'The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)', he decides that a *Bildungsroman* is, at heart, a tale of growth:

'An analysis of typical novel plots shows that they presuppose a ready-made, unchanging hero; they presuppose the hero's static unity. Movement in the fate and life of this ready-made hero constitutes the content of the plot; but the character of the man himself, his change and emergence do not become the plot. ... Along with this predominant, mass type, there is another incomparably rarer type of novel that provides an image of man in the process of becoming. As opposed to a static unity, here one finds a dynamic unity in the hero's image. The hero himself, his character, becomes a variable in the formula of this type of novel. Changes in the hero himself acquire plot significance, and thus the entire plot of the novel is reinterpreted and reconstructed. Time is introduced into man, enters into his very image, changing in a fundamental way the significance of all aspects of his life and destiny. This type of novel can be designated in the most general sense as the novel of human emergence' (2006: 21).

As Swales puts it, gender bias aside:

'It is a novel form that is animated by a concern for the whole man unfolding organically in all his complexity and richness. *Bildung* becomes, then, a total growth process, a diffused *Werden*, or becoming, involving something more intangible than the acquirement of a finite number of lessons' (1978: 14).

Indeed, Karl von Morgenstern, an obscure professor of rhetoric credited with coining the term *Bildungsroman*, noted a difference between the way in which the epic shows an active hero influencing his surroundings, and the way in which the novel 'presents more the people and surroundings influencing the hero and explain[s] to us the gradual formation (*Bildung*) of his inner self' (Martini 1991: 17):

'[T]he novel, among all poetic forms, can be considered the broadest vessel in which every specimen of the soul has room and air to put out shoots, to sprout and to blossom, to branch out and to spread in the entire fullness of its nature. ... [T]he novel, as shall be shown further in comparison with the epic of the Greeks, is precisely suited above all other genres to lead us into the inner regions of human souls and to reveal their presentiments, strivings, struggles, defeats and conquests' (Morgenstern cited in Martini 1991: 14).

Setting out to build upon this observation, in a lecture entitled 'On the Spirit and Connection of a Series of Philosophical Novels', which was held in the main hall of the Imperial University of Dorpat (now the University of Tartu) on 12th December 1810, Morgenstern called the introduction to his lecture 'On the Essence of *Bildungsromane*'. And inspired by the novels of Friedrich Maximilian Klinger, the head of the university, demonstrated a fascination with the concept of *Bildung*, which had changed greatly over the course of the eighteenth century (Martini 1991: 3). Where the century's beginning had seen 'the new texts that appeared at the annual book fairs ... primarily written in Latin and devoted to theology', '[b]y the end of the century the number of new publications each year had increased almost exponentially, with the novel leading the way' (Kontje 1992:1). Correspondingly, where the start of the century saw *Bildung* envisaged as 'God's active transformation of the passive Christian', by the century's close, '[t]ransformation into the perfect unity of God [had] turn[ed] into the development of one's unique self':

'Organic imagery of natural growth replace[d] a model of divine intervention. ... Christian faith in a Second Coming that would mark the end of history yielded to the struggle for human progress in an open-ended process of historical change' (Kontje 1992: 1-2).

Johann Gottfried Herder's work, for instance, contained a discernible strain of environmental determinism, with *Bildung* depicted as involving 'the development of innate genetic potential under the influence of a particular geographical and cultural setting' (Kontje 1993: 2), whereas Wilhelm von Humboldt had stressed the importance of human agency, decreeing that

'[o]ur true purpose in life is to cultivate our diverse talents into a balanced whole. ... Nature provides the "seed," but it is up to humans to develop to their full potential through active engagement with the world around them' (Kontje 1993: 4).

Integral to the wrangling about the essence and texture of the *Bildungsroman* are analyses which focus in on national specificities. For example, Thomas L. Jeffers asserts that nineteenth-century German, English, and American *Bildungsromane* differ in how much emphasis they put upon the protagonist's individualisation and how much emphasis they put upon their socialisation:

'Very simply, the Germans tended to focus attention on the individual's cultivation, while neglecting responsibility for the national culture. The English tried ... to be attentive toward both: one's development as an I depended not only on the richness of one's inner life, but on the affiliations one had with the people – family, friends, acquaintances, and strangers – who constituted and shared one's social environment. The American note ... was struck somewhere between the German and the English. Nineteenth-century Americans could be very civically responsible, but material conditions – from the greater privacy afforded people within a still largely rural or small town population, to the cushion provided by widely shared wealth – favored a Germanic sort of profundity about the individual self' (2005: 35).

Similarly, Martin Swales postulates that

'the English novel of adolescence (*Great Expectations*, *The Way of All Flesh*, *Jude the Obscure*, *Clayhanger*, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*) operates with a precisely articulated and documented sense of the specific pressures – societal, institutional, psychological – which militate against the hero's quest for self-fulfilment. Such kinds of resistance are rarely portrayed in the German *Bildungsroman* with any bite or urgency. The forces which oppose its hero ... tend to be ontologically, rather than socially, based' (1978 34-35).

Certainly, Patricia Alden provides ample evidence that class-conflict is a noteworthy feature of the English *Bildungsroman* (1986), and as Susan Ferguson attests, 'Dickens was at the forefront of a current of 19th century writers – literary, scientific and popular – who drew upon the figure of the victimized child ... as a lever of social critique' (2013).

In particular, Moretti's exploration of the nineteenth-century European *Bildungsroman* is pronounced in its assessment of national character. Proclaiming eighteenth and nineteenth-century English society to be 'the most stable in Europe', 'despite the Industrial Revolution and Chartism', and linking this state of affairs to the

inception of the English legal system, which he believes was essentially an expression of the 'hegemony of the eighteenth-century gentry and aristocracy' (2000: 185), he contends that 'classification', as opposed to 'transformation', is the dominant mode of the nineteenth-century English *Bildungsroman* (2000: 181-228). Whilst Continental youth were experiencing 'indefiniteness, social and spiritual mobility, giddiness of freedom', English youth were '[c]hannelled into places and activities tightly secluded from the rest of the world (boarding schools, and the major nineteenth-century invention – sport)' (Moretti 2000: 184-185). Continental youth enjoyed 'initiation', whilst English youth had to make do with 'preservation' (2000: 182), and the result, he alleges, 'was the worst novel of the West, and the boldest culture of justice' (2000: 214). Comparable to both fairy tales (2000: 185) and legal trials (2000: 212), he claims, the nineteenth-century English *Bildungsroman* tends to depict a "'common" hero' (2000: 189), whom it surrounds with 'a dense array of peculiar, maniacal and unmistakable characters incarnating the opposite principle' (2000: 192), and is typically at pains to show 'justice' (2000: 213) done and 'democracy' (2000: 191) enacted, with 'good' characters rewarded and 'bad' characters punished, and 'the recognition-inheritance pattern, virtually non-existent in European narrative, ... the most typical form of the English happy end' (2000: 205).

Alongside the dissection of national particularities, *Bildungsromane* with female protagonists have had a degree of critical attention. Indeed, Daniela Berghahn talks of 'ever-changing adaptations ... such as the female, the post-colonial, the queer, and the black *Bildungsroman*' (2010: 240). For instance, in her unpublished thesis, Jeannine Blackwell undertakes a comprehensive study of German *Bildungsromane* with female protagonists, 1770-1900, and testifies that: 'Characters fare best when they deny their independence and submit to the demands of society. Those who do not do so risk ostracism, madness, or death' (Blackwell 1982 cited in Kontje 1993: 106). And by contrast, Esther Kleinbord Labovitz makes 1900 her starting point and finds that '[f]or the eighteenth and nineteenth century German fictional heroine, as for ... real life figures, the concept of *Bildung* virtually passed her by' (1986: 4), resolving that the female *Bildungsroman* simply did not exist before the twentieth century.

Notably, there appears to be a general consensus that the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have brought along a range of female *Bildungsromane* which are, by and large, hopeful in tone, and that this trend both mirrors and contributes to the rise of feminism. Elaine Martin, for example, concludes that the female *Bildungsroman* is more likely to portray a vertical, rather than a linear, trajectory (1983). And Anne White names the *Bildungsroman* 'the most popular form of feminist fiction' (1985: 195) – a position which may be aligned with Rita Felski's stance that '[t]he novel of self-discovery is an essentially optimistic genre, reflecting the historical process of women coming to consciousness of female identity as a potentially oppositional force to existing social and cultural values' (1986: 132). To summarise, alienation and victimisation are shown to give way to awakening and emancipation.

Additionally, the relationship between female *Bildungsromane* and feminism is complicated by Eve Tavor Bannet's discussion of a range of novels written by females, for other females, and concerned with the female experience (1991). Detailing great shifts in the representation of women between the end of the seventeenth century and the end of the eighteenth century, and linking this with information about the place of literature in the lives of women whose roles were generally limited to daughter, wife, mother, or mistress, Bannet illustrates that these novels not only '[bore] witness to the psychological and social ills that women [were] heir to' (1991: 226), but were composed so as to be instructive:

'The eighteenth-century female *Bildungsroman* was not always designed to give a minute account of the *Bildung* of its heroine; but it was designed to effect the *Bildung* of its readers and thus to effect changes in the manners and morals of the times' (1991: 196).

This idea is strikingly reminiscent of Morgenstern's initial thoughts on the *Bildungsroman*:

'It could well be called the *Bildungsroman*, first and foremost because of its content, because it presents the hero's *Bildung* from its inception and continuation until a certain stage of completion; secondly, however, because precisely through this presentation it encourages the cultivation of the reader more fully than any other type of novel' (Morgenstern cited in Martini 1991: 18).

The *Bildungsroman* is, then, a highly contested literary genre. At one end of the spectrum are those who favour an exclusionary outlook, theorising, for instance, that it is solely German, or only applicable to male protagonists, or must depict a positive outcome. And at the other end of the spectrum are those whose approach is more accommodating, conjecturing, for example, that it is totally transnational, pertinent to female protagonists as well as male protagonists, and does not necessarily end happily. Nevertheless, two principles identified by, respectively, Moretti (2000) and Bakhtin (2006), are difficult to dispute. Firstly, Moretti declares that '[y]outh acts as a sort of symbolic concentrate of the uncertainties and tensions of an entire cultural system, and the hero's growth becomes the narrative convention or *fictio* that permits the exploration of conflicting values' (2000: 185). And secondly, Bakhtin says of the protagonist's *Bildung*: 'He is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other. This transition is accomplished in him and through him' (2006: 23). Indeed, in the same way that Bakhtin goes on to distinguish the *Bildungsroman* from other types of novels by maintaining that it portrays a type of 'human emergence' which 'reflects the historical emergence of the world itself', as opposed to 'emergence ... against the immobile background of the world' (2006: 23), so Moretti goes on to accord the European *Bildungsroman* with the 'great symbolic task[]' of 'contain[ing] the unpredictability of social change, representing it through the fiction of youth: a turbulent segment of life, no doubt, but with a clear beginning, and an unmistakeable end' (2000: 230). In short, the *Bildungsroman* constitutes a unique 'mastering of historical time' (Moretti 2000: vii), proffering the reader a history that is, at once, deeply personal and socially conscious. And whilst there are no rules as to exactly how inward-looking or outward-looking the *Bildungsroman* should be, it is –

intrinsically – both, and such duality marks it out from the historical novel¹⁵, the regional novel¹⁶, and the social novel¹⁷, making it a remarkably distinctive art form.

Scholarship on the Relationship between Adolescence and Cinema

David M. Considine's *The Cinema of Adolescence* (1985) is considered to be the first major piece of Anglophone scholarship focusing on the way that cinema talks both about and to adolescents. Covering Hollywood from the 1930s to the early 1980s, and breaking up the field into four main areas – family, school, juvenile delinquency, and sexuality – Considine posits that, overall, attempts to represent adolescence 'provide audiences, young and old alike, with a peculiarly jaundiced view of American society and the role of adolescents within it' (1985: 276), and that whilst the early 1980s saw the treatment of adolescence become more nuanced, tasteless and insensitive portrayals were still appearing:

'As a highly selective medium, the film industry has been too preoccupied with the dramatic, the tragic, the delinquent, and the aberrant. In the process it has not only stereotyped the young but the institutions such as the family and the school through which they are socialised. These stereotypes run the risk not only of misinforming the young as to the nature of the world about them, but of misinforming parents, teachers, police, and the adult community in general as to what they can expect from the young' (1985: 273-274).

Regarding adolescents and their families, Considine's chapters entitled 'Movies' Monstrous Mums', 'Films' Failed Fathers', and 'Discovering Dad' suggest that, if it is not fractured relationships that occupy the narrative, the alternative is most likely to be the image of a 'fairy tale' (1985: 91) family. For instance, although the figure of the mother was depicted as veritably sacrosanct in films of the 1940s, the 1950s saw her either subjected to the influences of post-war propaganda pertaining to the role of women in society or perverted by the ascendancy of Freudian psychology, whilst the 1960s introduced a tendency for 'escape' into adultery and/or alcohol. Either pigeonholed as happy homemaker, or presented as a possessive and/or aggressive castrator, or cast as utterly irresponsible when it comes to even the most basic of parental duties, the role of a matriarch in an adolescent's life has, asserts Considine, proved compelling subject matter for filmmakers and audiences alike. In comparison, where on-screen fathers of the 1930s and 1940s were split between working-class villains and middle-class buffoons, the 1950s

¹⁵ 'As its name suggests the historical novel sets its events and characters in a well-defined historical context, and it may include both fictional and real characters. It is often distinguished (in its more respectable forms) by convincing detailed description of the manners, buildings, institutions and scenery of its chosen setting, and generally attempts to convey a sense of historical verisimilitude' (Hawthorn 1996: 31).

¹⁶ 'The regional novel involves an especial focus of attention on to the life of a particular, well-defined geographical region. Traditionally the region in question will be rural rather than urban' (Hawthorn 1996: 31).

¹⁷ 'The social novel emphasizes the influence of the social and economic conditions of an era on characters and events; often it also embodies an implicit or explicit thesis recommending political and social reform' (Abrams 1993: 133).

had them so busy with work that they relied upon their wives to translate teenage life for him, and the 1960s brought them back into the fold as charismatic Jack Kennedy sorts.

Running alongside this, schoolteachers were, with the notable exception of *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (1939), characterised as incidental to the lives of adolescents in the films of the 1930s and 1940s, and then burst onto screens in the 1950s as American society put the purpose and methods of their educational system under scrutiny. Amongst the range of 'types' were 'social misfits, lovable old bears, fuddy-duddies, ineffectual quacks, rag ends of unsaleable males and unmarriageable females' (Considine 1985: 113), but of particular significance was the figure of the teacher who is new to a school, initially struggles to 'make a difference', and then, via sheer persistence, is ennobled. Typified by Richard Dadiere (Glenn Ford) in *The Blackboard Jungle* (1955) – a film which Considine claims 'embodied all the key elements that were to dominate the celluloid classroom in the years ahead' (1985: 123) – the 'teacher hero' stood out against an unsavoury drift:

'Between 1935 and 1977 ... one finds irrefutable evidence of an increasingly negative depiction of the teacher. It is a process by which the image of the teacher moves from mentor to murderer, from scholar to scapegoat. In the end the teacher is reduced to victim, voyeur, seducer, and killer' (1985: 114).

With a decisive feature of Hollywood's tales of adolescence the general failure of mothers, fathers, and teachers to guide their charges towards successful individualisation and socialisation, the prominent figure of the juvenile delinquent and, more often than not, his – but sometimes her – gang of reprobates was an unsurprising phenomenon:

'In the delinquent stories, Hollywood inherits the legacy of its previous depiction of adolescence. Having systematically deprived its celluloid sons and daughters of positive images of parents and pedagogues, it found itself forced to turn them over to the pervasive influence of the peer group' (Considine 1985: 157).

As detailed in Considine's chapters entitled 'Dead Ends and Death Rows 1931-1949' and 'Rebels With and Without Causes 1950-1980', practically every decade between the 1930s and the 1980s had its own cycle of J.D. films, such as *Boys Town* (1938), *Girls on Probation* (1938), *Angels With Dirty Faces* (1938), *Angels Wash Their Faces* (1939), *The Wild One* (1954), *On the Waterfront* (1954), *East of Eden* (1954), and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). In fact, '[b]etween 1954 and 1959 Hollywood had saturated audiences with stories either totally or partially centered around delinquents' (Considine 1985: 193), and '[n]o period before and no period since has seen such a sustained and systematic attempt to court the adolescent audience by the sensationalised depiction of teenage crime and waywardness' (Considine 1985: 182).

By some contrast, whilst Hollywood's treatment of adolescent sexuality from the 1930s to the early 1980s is undoubtedly marked by an absence of realistic images, '[i]t is impossible not to notice the increased sophistication with which the movies ... dealt with the subject of sex' (Considine 1985: 268). Images of sanitised courtship in films of the 1930s

and 1940s made way for a more enlightened stance in the 1950s and 1960s – ‘a healthier and more honest vision ... in which sex was seen as a natural part of growing up’ (Considine 1985: 231) – and although it is notable that British cinema was widely regarded as more progressive in this area, Hollywood certainly ‘moved its adolescents from the question of sex to gender, from the issue of having sex to the question of what it means to be sexual’ (Considine 1985: 234). Where the films of the 1930s and 1940s had portrayed adolescent sexuality as ‘threatening because it distracted from building for the future’ (Considine 1985: 216), by the 1970s and early 1980s, it was not uncommon to see issues of vulnerability aired, masturbation mentioned, and the championing of liberated and libidinal adolescent females.

In the wake of Considine’s publication, Thomas Doherty’s *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s* (2002) offers the theory that ‘the decline of classical Hollywood cinema and the rise of the privileged American teenager’ (12) led to the ‘courtship of the teenage audience’, and that this ‘shift in marketing strategy and production initiated a progressive “juvenilization” of film content and the film audience that is today the operative reality of the American motion picture business’ (2). More specifically, providing key information about ‘exploitation’ in the film industry, in the form of general marketing strategies and the ‘serving up [of] appetizing or exotic subject matter’ (2002: 2), and linking it to the gradual abandonment of the Hays Code, the creation of the ‘teenager’, and the growth of ‘youth culture’, Doherty charts the birth of the ‘teenpic’ in the 1950s and traces its echoes in the decades thereafter. The producer, Sam Katzman, was a leading figure, he postulates, and ‘rock ‘n’ roll teenpics’ (2002: 54), starting with *Rock Around the Clock* (1956), were instrumental in enticing a teenage audience. Furthermore, avers Doherty, the 1950s saw a distinct dichotomy between ‘teenpics’ which ‘showcased the underside of teenage life, portraying a reckless, rebellious, and troubled generation beset by problems of inner and/or outer space’, and those which ‘were light, breezy, romantic, and frankly escapist’ (2002: 159), with the decade’s close characterised by a direction ‘towards unabashedly wholesome entertainment that was at once teen-targeted and parent approved: the clean teenpic’ (2002: 152). Following this, the 1960s brought ‘The Gentrification of the Teenpic’ (Doherty 2002: 189), namely, a ‘postclassical ... retreading, revamping, and reinventing [of] the generic blueprints of the original teenpics of the 1950s’ (Doherty 2002: 190). As the teenagers of the 1950s became the adults of the 1960s, this decade was conspicuous for the ‘crossover appeal’ (Doherty 2002: 193) of films like *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *The Graduate* (1967), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), and *Easy Rider* (1969), and it is this trend, he says, that set the tone for Hollywood for years to come. The industry realised, for example, that ‘[t]eenpics about past teenagers could appeal jointly to the teenage audience of the moment and their nostalgic elder siblings and parents’ (Doherty 2002: 193), and thus films such as *American Graffiti* (1973), *Grease* (1976), *Back to the Future* (1985), and *Dirty Dancing* (1987) were and still are hugely popular. Indeed, in light of the cult status of numerous films from George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, and John

Hughes, and the way that *Titanic* (1997) drew hordes of teenage girls, it is arguable that teen-oriented fare became the staple of Hollywood cinema.

Whilst Doherty concentrates on the ways in which Hollywood has targeted teenage audiences, Timothy Shary's *Generation Multiplex: The Image of Youth in Contemporary Cinema* (2002) looks at 'how the image of youth developed in American cinema' (255) from 1980 to 1999, specialising in the portrayal of 12-20 year olds¹⁸. Just as Doherty maintains that 'teenpics' of the 1950s have had a lasting influence upon Hollywood cinema, all the way into the twenty-first century, so Shary avows that the 1980s saw an 'augmentation of teen films', and that this was inextricably bound up with 'the emergence of a particular icon of youth independence, the shopping mall' (2005: 54). '[F]ilms about youth actually constitute a genre' (2002: 6), declares Shary, and Hollywood films of the last two decades of the twentieth century have 'appeared almost fixated on capturing certain youth styles and promoting certain perspectives on the celebration (or really, survival) of adolescence' (2002: 1). In particular, attests Shary, 1980-1985 saw

'six major approaches to youth cinema offered by Hollywood, most revised from past trends in the genre: the horror film, the science film, the sex comedy, the romantic melodrama, the juvenile delinquent drama, and the school picture that often borrowed generic elements from the rest' (2002: 8)

and these 'still form the frame in which youth films are made and marketed in the early twenty-first century', with five 'subgenres' (2002: 9) dominating American cinema's depictions of youth in the 1980s and 1990s – the school film (2002: 26-79), the youth/teen delinquency film (2002: 80-136), the youth/teen horror film (2002: 137-179), the youth/teen science film (2002: 180-208), and the youth/teen love/sex film (2002: 209-254). For instance, the youth horror film's graphic images of sex and violence have 'brought attention to teen sexuality and morality ... by the most dramatic means possible', whilst youth sex comedies and romantic melodramas have varied from gratuitous and/or facile, to sensitive and/or cautionary, with 'virginity, pregnancy and homosexuality' (2002: 9) given special attention. Further to this, juvenile delinquent dramas have been markedly prominent:

'Perhaps the clearest trend in delinquent depictions arrived with the African American crime films of the early '90s, which were not only quite profitable, but addressed previously under-discussed issues about the effects of race, class, and cultural conditions on youth' (2002: 82).

And as encapsulated by *The Breakfast Club* (1985), '[s]chool films are probably the most foundational subgenre of youth films', with five character types – 'the nerd, the jock, the rebel, the popular girl, and the delinquent' – or, at least, variations on these character types,

¹⁸ Shary's *Teen Movies: American Youth on Screen* (2005) is essentially a shorter version of *Generation Multiplex: The Image of Youth in Contemporary American Cinema* (2002), with coverage extended to films from 2000-2004.

cropping up in all of the other 'subgenres' (2002: 9). Surveying the vast landscape of American 'youth cinema' from 1980 to 1999, Shary finds that:

'Overall, American youth films in the late twentieth century depicted teenagers as an increasingly self-aware group, who are still learning much about life and about who they are, and who are usually doing so with energy and intelligence. This generally positive depiction has not prevented a number of films from vilifying youth or representing them as irresponsible and stupid, yet these films are the exception. Most often, even within condemning films, at least one teenage character retains some sense of integrity or morality' (2002: 261).

For example: 'the nerd' is increasingly valued by his peers, especially when they are an intellectual and exhibit 'proud perseverance'; 'the jock'/athlete has become a rather more sincere and sympathetic figure, if somewhat less visible; 'the rebel has more reasons to revolt'; 'the popular girl'/student has gained a certain vulnerability, 'shown struggling with many of the same identity issues as their less accepted counterparts'; and 'the delinquent' is more often than not drawn as a victim of social problems created by adults (Shary 2002: 259-260). Importantly, however, Shary also discovers that, despite an increase in the number of roles available to girls and African Americans, the former are still relatively underrepresented, and the latter, too often associated with criminality. In addition, Latino roles remain few and far between, and extensive coverage of '[p]regnancy, abortion, and parenting' occurs at the expense of explorations of 'drugs, depression, and divorce' (Shary 2002: 259). All in all, he concludes, American 'youth cinema' has shown a decidedly progressive bent in recent decades, but there is still work to be done to 'respect and celebrate all of the discoveries, anxieties, opportunities, pains, wonders, and joys of what it means to be young' (2002: 264).

Aside from the pioneering studies of Considine, Doherty, and Shary, a handful of other publications have contributed to the conversation started by these scholars. For instance, Jon Lewis's *The Road to Romance and Ruin* (1992) concerns American 'films about teenagers, not films targeted at teenagers' (2) – its central idea being that 'teen films all seem to focus on a single social concern: the breakdown of traditional forms of authority: patriarchy; law and order; and institutions like the school, the church, and the family' (3). Viewing his work as 'several potential interventions, several potential avenues into the serious study of youth culture', Lewis argues that 'teen films narrativize – ... give order to – the otherwise chaotic contradictory experience of youth': 'These narratives historicize youth, contextualise youth, re-contextualise youth, re-present youth' (1992: 2-3). For him, '[n]arrative is ... inherently ideological, inherently social – an authorizing force in a culture [youth culture] that is at once systematically ridiculed and idealized by those unlucky of us on the outside looking in' (1992: 3). Similarly, Sarah Hentges's *Pictures of Girlhood: Modern Female Adolescence on Film* (2005) forms a 'critical survey of film and the modern girl', concentrating largely on American films of the 1980s and 1990s and, in particular, 'key themes', 'the changing young female paradigm, and the ways in which these films can be powerful determinants of culture' (back cover). Writing about films which 'are characterised

by their focus on a lead female character and her coming of age', she proposes that 'in order to empower girls and women by highlighting a specific body of films that speak directly to' them, these 'teen coming-of-age films about girls' be labelled "'girls' film'" (2005: 2-3). Further to this, Geoff Pevere contends that the ideology behind 'the Hollywood teenflick'¹⁹ is 'the systematic acknowledgement, exploitation and containment of the insurrectionary impulses of adolescence': 'The prevailing purpose of the American teen flick', he alleges, 'is the defusing of any perceived threats to conventional order posed by the constant threat of teen transgression' (1988: 45). And likewise, Jeannette Sloniowski asserts that '[t]he conventional teen film, as a part of Louis Althusser's "ideological state apparatus," helps to socialize teenagers and reassure adults that all kids are basically good kids':

'Far from harping on the shallowness or banality of the genre, [Doherty and Acland] both argue that the troubled teenager is one of the "crucial tropes" (Acland 133) in the successful reproduction of the social order of Western society, and that in fact, in spite of the glamor of the rebellious teenager, teen films are ideologically driven morality tales that, in the absence of "healthy adult" guidance, attempt to socialize teenagers into "normal," middle-class American life. As Lewis argues, "teen films continue to insist that parents need to listen to their teenagers, and, ironically, in the absence of such a dialogue – such a conceit in the vast majority of teen movie narratives – the films themselves stand in with authoritative and authoritarian morality lessons of their own" (66). ... [A]s Lewis puts it, the teen film "fuels the notion that discipline and order are what teenagers need; indeed, it's also what they want" (49)' (1997).

Indeed, Pevere goes so far as to say that 'the primary purpose of most teen movies – with their emphasis on initiation and rites of passage – [is] the construction of adults' (1988: 46).

Perhaps most notably, Catherine Driscoll's *Teen Film: A Critical Introduction* (2011) is an attempt to both pull together and build upon the work of Considine, Doherty, and Shary, with Driscoll, asking the question, 'What makes a film a teen film?' (back cover), or more precisely: what kind of adolescence does teen film represent?; who exactly is the audience of teen film?; and is teen film a distinctly American product? More specifically, '[g]iv[ing] priority to mainstream popular Anglophone films that predominantly address a youthful audience for stories about adolescence' (2011: 3), she shows that Hollywood has undoubtedly been the most prolific source of films about and for adolescents, and that, just as globalisation has given rise to the 'internationalization of adolescence' and 'transnational dialogues over maturity and citizenship', so there is a discernible 'continuity of teen film across different cultures' (2011: 149). Further to this, she decides that 'teen film is defined most of all by its audience' (2011: 1), and that anybody with the 'normal qualities of youth' – 'naiveté, idealism, humour, hatred of tradition, erotomania, and a sense of injustice' (Martin 1994: 66-67 cited in Driscoll 2011: 2) – is likely to have an appetite for 'teen film'. Charlie Lyne may claim that '[t]een film is the only genre that is defined by the age of its audience' (2014), but 'the teen in teen movie is a very elastic, bill-of-fare word; it refers not to biological age, but a type, a mode of behaviour, a way of being' (Martin 1994: 66-67 cited

¹⁹ Looking at the film titles cited by Pevere, it is clear that what he means by 'Hollywood teenflick' is films about teenagers.

in Driscoll 2011: 2). Indeed, proclaims Driscoll, '[t]he pleasures of teen film partly lie in restaging and recrossing the fantastic line between childhood and adulthood. This is a key component of teen film's dialogue with an "adult" audience' (2011: 108). Crucially, however, 'teen film' also exposes the nature of adolescence as a 'transient shimmering promise of possibilities that rarely materialises, never holds, and quickly passes away' (Driscoll 2011: 101). Whilst allowing its audience 'a fantasy of escaping responsibility and of open possibilities' (Driscoll 2011: 108), 'teen film' also makes it clear that adult life brings as many losses as it does gains.

It can be seen, then, that scholarship on the relationship between adolescence and cinema is dominated by American-centric discourse:

'Scholarship on teen film continues to focus overwhelmingly on US teen film with the general unmarked inclusion of Canada, occasional side-references to other Anglophone nations, and rare invocations of strange differences or parallels in other countries' (Driscoll 2011: 149).

Additionally, it is characterised by: a preoccupation with the accuracy of the portrayal of adolescents, with a particular interest in stereotyping; a concern with the role of adults and institutions (school, the church, the law, etc.) in young people's lives; and a desire to interrogate the blurred line between films which are a commodity for adolescents and films which are a commentary upon adolescence.

Supplementing this body of work are four collections of essays which widen the field to non-Anglophone films: *Sugar, Spice and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood* (2003) and *Where the Boys Are: Cinemas of Masculinity and Youth* (2005) edited by Frances Gateward and Murray Pomerance; *Youth Cinema in Global Culture* (2007) edited by Shary and Alexandra Seibel; and *Coming of Age on Film: Stories of Transformation in World Cinema* (2009) edited by Anne Hardcastle, Roberta Morosini and Kendall Tarte. For example, *Youth Cinema in Global Culture* deliberates:

'images of youth resistance on film (with an emphasis on the reception of imported American film); the appearance of the "youth problem" film across different cultures since the 1980s (China, Eastern and Central Europe, and the US); youth as a site of cultural conflict in the contemporary film cultures of Latin America, Brazil, Egypt, India, and Turkey; changing gender roles in films about adolescents from New Zealand, the UK, France, Italy, Spain, and the US; and finally young "queer" sexuality in American, Swedish, and German film' (Driscoll 2011: 149).

Covering a diverse range of films from across the globe, these anthologies are a meaningful supplement to the work of Considine, Doherty, Shary, Lewis, Hentges, Pevere, Sloniowski and Driscoll, and stand as evidence that the relationship between cinema and adolescence is fast becoming a topic of international debate.

Chapter Two

Defining the Coming-of-Age Genre and its Specific Manifestation in Contemporary British Cinema

The Dominance of the American Film Industry

As indicated in Chapter One, Anglophone scholarship on the relationship between adolescence and cinema is dominated by a focus on the American film industry. The first major publication, David M. Considine's *The Cinema of Adolescence* (1985), brings into play a handful of British films, but its primary remit is Hollywood from the 1930s to the early 1980s, and two equally significant publications have followed suit – Thomas Doherty's *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s* (2002), which contends that Hollywood's targeting of teenage audiences in the 1950s was not only a significant development but actually became its *modus operandi*, and Timothy Shary's *Generation Multiplex: The Image of Youth in Contemporary Cinema* (2002), which delineates and evaluates the portrayal of young people in American cinema from 1980 to 1999. Indeed, it would appear that, in terms of periodisation, Shary deliberately picks up from where Considine leaves off, and Considine fittingly provides the Foreword to Shary's book, stressing that his own analysis 'was not intended as the definitive study of youth and the movies', but '[r]ather, ... an attempt to "map out a cinematic terrain, the geography of which must now be thrown open for further exploration"' (2002: x)²⁰.

Further to this, although Frances Gateward and Murray Pomerance's edited anthologies on, respectively, girlhood (2002) and boyhood (2005), are not restricted to an examination of American films, the majority of the essays included are of that bent. And just as Jon Lewis's (1992) and Sarah Hentges's (2005) work makes occasional reference to British titles but concentrates mainly on American output, so Catherine Driscoll's discussion tries to 'mov[e] away from the America-centric bias' (2011: back cover) but deals largely in American fare²¹. In fact, the only explicitly relevant entry in *The Cinema Book* (2007) is Steve Neale's 'Teenpics' (367-373), which is, in turn, based mostly on Doherty's book. And the

²⁰ Although Shary's Introduction only touches upon the issue of target audience, it is important to acknowledge that he does not ignore the matter. As indicated in the title of his book, he observes that 'the multiplex movement' saw 'the centralization of American movie theaters in large retail centers' coincide with the way in which 'the shopping mall ... became a scene of teen congregation', bringing about 'a voluminous outpouring of films directed to and featuring teens' (2002: 6). More specifically, 'in order to avoid a stagnating homogenization of the teen genre, Hollywood revised its '50s formula by intensifying the narrative range of youth films through placing teenage characters in previously established genres' (Shary 2002: 6).

²¹ Driscoll concedes that because one of her overarching concerns is the dominance of 'American standards' of 'teen film', her consideration of 'teen film' from other countries is 'less extensive' (2011: 3) than her discussion of American output.

only publications with an overtly international/transnational bent are two anthologies edited by, respectively, Shary and Alexandra Seibel (2007), and Anne Hardcastle, Roberta Morosini and Kendall Tarte (2009).

In addition to its overwhelming preoccupation with the American film industry, Anglophone scholarship on the relationship between adolescence and cinema is marked by an insistence on genre analysis. Doherty (2002) and Neale assert that ‘teenpics’ are a genre, with Neale’s aforementioned entry in *The Cinema Book* (2007), in fact, lifted from his book entitled *Genre and Hollywood* (2000). Lewis (1992) and Driscoll (2011) speak of ‘teen film’ as a genre. And Shary maintains that ‘youth film’ is a ‘genre [that] has only recently been identified in film studies’ (2002: 16), employing the term ‘teen film’ only when he feels that it is necessary to distinguish teenagers from young people in general, and suggesting that there are five main ‘subgenres’ (2002: 9) – the school film (2002: 26-79), the youth/teen delinquency film (2002: 80-136), the youth/teen horror film (2002: 137-179), the youth/teen science film (2002: 180-208), and the youth/teen love/sex film (2002: 209-254). Gateward and Pomerance may prefer to talk of ‘films about girls/girlhood’ (2002) and ‘films about boys/boyhood’ (2005), and Hardcastle, Morosini and Tarte, to pick out ‘the theme of coming of age’ (2009: 1), but in the main, the names ‘teenpics’, ‘teen film’ and ‘youth film’ are deployed as genre labels.

However, despite the confidence with which the majority of the aforementioned scholars enlist the concept of genre, there is an obvious lack of clarity and consensus when it comes to the meanings of the terms circulating. Berghahn may be under the impression that ‘teenpics’ and ‘youth film’ ‘are used almost interchangeably in the American context’ (2010: 252), but the issue of nomenclature is arguably more complex. Although it is straightforward enough that Doherty should elect to dub Hollywood films targeted at a teenage audience in the 1950s ‘teenpics’, his contention that this ‘courtship of the teenage audience ... initiated a progressive “juvenilization” of film content and the film audience’ (2002: 2) leads to a concluding chapter that uses ‘teenpics’ to also refer to ‘crossover’ films of subsequent decades, that is, films which ‘appeal jointly to the teenage audience of the moment and their nostalgic elder siblings and parents’ (2002: 191), and yet claims, too, that ‘by around the mid-1960s, teenage culture was supplanted by the more expansive youth culture’ (2002: 190) and that ‘[a]s teenagers became “youth” and subculture became “counterculture,” teenpics became “youth-cult films”’ (2002: 191). In short, his terminology is unhelpfully loose. By comparison, Driscoll acknowledges that where once she separated ‘teen film’ from ‘youth film’, seeing the former as films ‘centered on the institutional life of adolescents at home and school’ and the latter as ‘packed with rebellious subcultural cachet’, she now thinks that ‘separating “teen” and “youth” film obscures the importance of their shared discourse on adolescence’ (2011: 3)²². Indeed, the signification of ‘teen film’ seems to be open to interpretation. Lewis’s definition is ‘films about teenagers, not films

²² In light of this observation, it is somewhat puzzling that Driscoll should decide to call her book *Teen Film: A Critical Introduction* (2011).

targeted at teenagers' (1992: 2), and Shary indicates that he, too, subscribes to this position, pronouncing that 'youth film' consists of 'films in which youth appear' (2002: 17)²³, and that 'teen film' is, therefore, simply 'youth film' which portrays teenagers. But Driscoll complicates the matter by, on the one hand, concurring that 'teen film' consists of 'stories about adolescence', and on the other hand, questioning what she sees as an assumption that 'teen film is ... for adolescents' (2011: 3). Averring, more specifically, that 'teen film is defined most of all by its audience' (2011: 1) and that that audience is not necessarily adolescent, rather, 'youthful' (2011: 3), she invokes Adrian Martin to suggest that the 'youthful' audience of 'teen film' is characterised by 'naïveté, idealism, humour, hatred of tradition, erotomania, and a sense of injustice' (Martin 1994: 66-67 cited in Driscoll 2011: 2). Thus when it comes to interpreting 'teen film', a general agreement regarding the age of the protagonists unites Lewis, Shary and Driscoll, but there is a clear difference between Lewis and Shary's choice to concentrate upon the depiction of teenagers, and Driscoll's decision to, like Doherty, also bring into play the issue of audience. Additionally, out of all of the scholars mentioned, Shary is the only one to be exact about the age of the protagonists of 'youth/teen film', '[f]or the purposes of [his] study, ... consider[ing] the youth population to be between the ages of 12 and 20' (2002: 17), and openly sidelining films with protagonists in their twenties on the grounds that 'the college genre has itself already been extensively covered in other studies' and that his 'primary focus ... [is] teen representation' (2002: 18)²⁴.

A Transnational Approach and a Marxist Approach

In terms of scholarship on the portrayal of adolescence in other national cinemas, it is worth turning initially to Berghahn's 'Coming of Age in "the Hood": The Diasporic Youth Film and Questions of Genre', which represents a decisive attempt to reconcile genre criticism with the way in which 'European films about adolescence are not considered in terms of their generic properties but rather in relation to a particular *auteur's* oeuvre or European film movement' (2010: 238). Influenced by Shary, the second section entitled 'The youth film' proposes that 'coming-of-age narratives', along with 'the high-school film' and 'rebellious and delinquent youth films', are examples of 'European youth cinema' which

²³ Shary adds that 'not even all "films in which youth appear" can properly be identified as youth cinema (usually because the young characters are secondary to adult leads)' (2002: 17), but sticks with his definition nevertheless.

²⁴ Pam Hirsch's Introduction to her article on *Girlfight* (2000) and *Fish Tank* (2009) demonstrates the lack of clarity and consensus that I am discussing in this section. She states that she 'prefer[s] Considine's term' ('cinema of adolescence') but 'for shorthand convenience ... will, like cultural theorist Catherine Driscoll, in this essay refer to "teen film"', and although she aligns herself with Driscoll's use of Martin – 'the teen in teen movie is itself a very elastic, bill-of-fare word; it refers not to a biological age, but a type, a mode of behaviour, a way of being' (Martin 1994: 66-67 cited in Driscoll 2011: 2) – she goes on to assert that 'Hollywood's central interest in making teen films has always been to make films that young people, more or less regarded as being in the sixteen to twenty-four age bracket would want to see' (2014: 470), echoing Doherty. In short, Hirsch does not seem to appreciate fully the way that Driscoll problematises what she sees as a widespread assumption that 'teen film is ... for adolescents' (Driscoll 2011: 3).

‘lend themselves to classification along the lines of Hollywood’s subgenres’ (Berghahn 2010: 238)²⁵. And the third section labelled ‘Coming-of-age films’ posits that:

‘Given that coming-of-age films are by definition concerned with identity formation and that the family, as well as the peer group, function as the two most significant poles in this process, generational conflict is a staple plot device’ (Berghahn 2010: 241).

Going on to theorise that ‘coming-of-age narratives in post-colonial literature and diasporic cinema share a number of distinctive features’ (Berghahn 2010: 240), Berghahn suggests ‘a hybrid genre’ – the ‘diasporic coming-of-age film’ (2010: 241) – and referencing films such as *East is East* (1999), *Anita and Me* (2002), *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) and *Bullet Boy* (2004)²⁶, explores how the protagonists of such works undergo ‘hybrid identity formation’ (2010: 245):

‘The diasporic coming-of-age film centres on adolescents who are marked as ethnically or racially “other” and are growing up in a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse milieu. It charts the formation of the protagonists’ hybrid identities, which, in terms of the film’s narrative structure, translates into a set of binary oppositions which the protagonist has to negotiate: the claustrophobic home vs. the “cool places” where youths hang out; the parents’ culture of origin vs. the culture of residence; oppressive patriarchy vs. liberal Western culture. While parents typically uphold the values and traditions of the “other” culture, the peer group provides the link with the culture of residence. Generational conflict within the family, a common plot device in many coming-of-age films, is doubly charged here since it is conflated with culture conflict’ (2010: 250).

Accentuating the difficulty of harmonising, in particular, different languages and dress codes, and emphasising how this is especially hard for adolescent girls living in patriarchal communities (Berghahn 2010: 245), Berghahn contrasts the disposition of a ‘Hollywood coming-of-age film’ to correlate ‘maturation’ with ‘an existential experience or a rite of passage’, with the tendency of a ‘diasporic coming-of-age film’ to equate ‘maturation’ with a sense of resolution regarding ‘cultural affiliation’ – concluding, on the basis of this difference, ‘that we are ... witnessing the hybridisation of the coming-of-age genre’ (2010: 251).

In contrast to Berghahn’s discussion of ‘identity formation’ (2010: 241) and ‘maturation’ (2010: 251) in ‘diasporic coming-of-age films’ (2000: 240), Paul Dave’s article ‘Choosing Death: Working-Class Coming of Age in Contemporary British Cinema’ (2013) utilises Franco Moretti’s work on the European *Bildungsroman* to examine representations of the coming-of-age process in contemporary British films and, as detailed in Chapter One, the central terms of the debate are ‘individualisation’ and ‘socialisation’ and the relationship between these two forms of development, with a key distinction to be made between

²⁵ In later work, Berghahn reiterates the idea that ‘coming-of-age narratives’ are a ‘subgenre[]’ of ‘European youth cinema’ (2010: 238), stating that *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) ‘fuses the generic conventions of (romantic) comedy, sports film and coming-of-age film, a sub-genre of the youth film’ (2013: 40).

²⁶ Berghahn considers more titles than those listed here, but because my focus is contemporary British cinema, I have chosen to mention only these ones.

stories which depict a challenging but essentially agreeable transition from childhood to adulthood, and those which are far less optimistic.

More specifically, focusing on 'contemporary British films that can be seen as responding to social and economic changes generally associated with neoliberalism' (Dave 2013: 746), Dave puts to one side 'coming of age narratives rooted in ... populist, bourgeois social affirmation, such as those associated with directors and writers like Richard Curtis and stars such as Hugh Grant' (2013: 747), and discussing the work of directors Danny Boyle, Anton Corbijn, Saul Dibb, Menhaj Huda, Ken Loach, John Madden, Shane Meadows and Penny Woolcock, as well as a production cycle of football films, 'seeks to identify representations of working-class experiences, both limiting and liberating, which mark the inherently problematic attempt to imagine a successful working-class coming of age' (2013: 746).

For example, Dave employs Moretti's division between the 'classical' *Bildungsroman* and the 'late' *Bildungsroman* in order to shed light upon the processes of individualisation and socialisation in *This is England* (2006), asserting that, unlike in the coming-of-age dramas of the 'classical' *Bildungsroman*, 'where individual development and socialisation harmonise' (2013: 758), the protagonist, Shaun Field (Thomas Turgoose), comes of age 'isolated and disillusioned': 'Alone on the beach, growth and increased self-consciousness are experienced as privation and isolation, and any promise of adulthood and fulfilling socialisation are hard to discern' (2013: 759). Although, initially, 'the welcoming space of the skinhead subculture ... provides shelter', Shaun's world is, ultimately, akin to that of the 'late' *Bildungsroman* – a place which is 'alienating and indifferent to individual development', where '[s]ocialisation is violent and depersonalised, and events turn against the hero' (Dave 2013: 752). Just as the 'late' *Bildungsroman* reflects 'the trauma of the First World War' (Dave 2013: 758), *This is England* portrays a country 'scarred by imperialist nationalisms' (Dave 2013: 759).

Dave also exploits Moretti's claim that there are significant national differences within the tradition of the European *Bildungsroman* – namely, between the coming-of-age tales of nineteenth-century England and Germany, in which youth are 'comfortably accommodated to a traditional social world of maturity' through their association with the new social forces of the bourgeoisie, and those that came out of post-revolutionary France and pre-revolutionary Russia, in which the 'ideals and desires' of youth clash with actuality, creating 'a culture of compromise, bad faith, illusion and cynicism' (Dave 2013: 748). Agreeing with Moretti that the novels of Charles Dickens and Charlotte Brontë portray 'a static social world' in which youth are 'insulat[ed] ... from the process of modern social mobility and the expectation of personal transformation' (Dave 2013: 749), Dave observes a 'resurfacing of the outlines of the English *Bildungsroman* in contemporary British film' (2013: 751) – especially in those films aimed at international audiences – arguing, for instance, that the 'providential narrative[s]' of *Millions* (2004) and *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) reverberate with the echoes of Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (2013: 751). Furthermore, Dave

takes Moretti's notion that the Balzacian protagonist is untroubled by 'the related injustices and inequalities generated by the social mechanism of competition', or rather, 'does not seek to challenge the social world to live up to the ideals of modernity, only to master its laws' (2013: 749), and posits that the coming-of-age process illustrated in *Trainspotting* (1996) fits such a mould perfectly. For Renton (Ewan McGregor), 'tragic conflicts and contradictions are neatly resolved into questions of vigour and vitality' (Dave 2013: 767). In the same way that the stories of Dickens, Brontë, and Honoré de Balzac 'train us to scrutinise events not for their ethical qualities, but solely out of an interest in the success or failure of the protagonist's negotiation of the chains of cause and effect radiating through an ultimately inscrutable social system' (2013: 749), so 'Boyle's films use the exhilaration of plot as a figure for the unbounded energies of capitalist culture' (2013: 750), of which Britain may be said to be 'a pioneer' (Dave 2013: 746).

Significantly, Dave also ponders the place of collectivity in coming-of-age films set in a working-class milieu – harnessing John Hill's point that the linear and individualising plots of the coming-of-age narratives of the so-called British New Wave may be usefully contrasted with the episodic and collective nature of the *Carry On* series (Hill 1986: 142-3), and singling out *Mischief Night* (2006) and *Looking for Eric* (2009) as examples of coming-of-age stories which privilege the power of collective action in working-class communities. In *Mischief Night* (2006), asserts Dave, one sees an isolated working-class environment in which the relationship between the individual and a cross-generational, multi-ethnic collective is 'strikingly intimate' (2013: 762), and in *Looking for Eric* (2009), 'Loach demonstrates the emergence of class struggle – a consciousness of how the working-class needs to take collective action to control the violent conditions of its existence – out of the destructive milieu of class conflict' (2013: 760). Eric Bishop's pre-diegetic life may exemplify 'the process of the young, male, working-class coming of age found in the British New Wave', where marriage is not 'the mature, reconciled relationship of individual desire and the social world but, rather, a feared moment, perceived as a loss of freedom in a future of alienated labour and domestic duty' (Dave 2013: 761). However, with 'the resources of a gathered working-class collective', he is able to experience a more successful coming of age later in life:

'[F]rom within the ... solidarities of a common culture, links between individual development and socialisation can become fruitful. ... Here, decisively, working-class characters are not rootless solitaries in inhospitable environments, as they tend to be in the late *Bildungsroman*' (Dave 2013: 761-762).

More fortunate than Ian Curtis of *Control* (2006), for whom marriage and children spell 'obligations that he cannot manage' (Dave 2013: 767), Eric, helped by his friends, gets a second chance.

Defining the Coming-of-Age Genre

I am indebted to Berghahn and Dave for their stimulating insights into the coming-of-age film, respectively, within European cinema and in comparison with Hollywood, and in terms of contemporary British cinema and its relation to the European *Bildungsroman*. In advocating an understanding of adolescence as a time of 'identity formation' (2010: 241) and 'maturation' (2010: 251), with 'the family, as well as the peer group, function[ing] as the two most significant poles in the process' (2010: 241), Berghahn provides a helpful framework for exploring some of the dynamics typically at work in cinematic representations of the coming-of-age process. And by tracing echoes of different modes of the European *Bildungsroman* in the contemporary British coming-of-age film, in particular, in a way that draws attention to class struggle, Dave illuminates the potential of both forms to speak to social, political, economic, cultural and historical concerns. Furthermore, Berghahn's emphasis on 'identity formation' presents a useful alternative to the clunky binary paradigms oft cited to encapsulate the transition from childhood to adulthood, such as innocence and experience, and dependence and independence. And in spite of my decision to engage with the model of a national cinema, her transnational angle is to be applauded for both its ambition and suitability to the topic of diaspora and migration.

However, both scholars' contributions throw up some unresolved issues. Although it is hard to disagree with Berghahn that 'coming-of-age films ... are concerned with identity formation' (2010: 241) and 'maturation' (2010: 251), and that, more often than not, 'the family ... [and] the peer group [] function as the two most significant poles in this process' (2010: 241), it seems a step in the wrong direction to classify 'coming-of-age narratives' (2010: 238)/'coming-of-age films' (2010: 239)/'diasporic coming-of-age films' (2010: 240) as 'subgenres' of 'European youth cinema' (2010: 238), and then talk of 'the coming-of-age genre' (2010: 251). Firstly, it is arguable that categorising 'coming-of-age films' as a 'subgenre' of 'youth film' is unnecessary because 'coming-of-age films' and 'youth film' are essentially one and the same: they both dramatise the experiences of young people. And secondly, there is an unexplained jump from discussing 'coming-of-age narratives' (2010: 238)/'coming-of-age films' (2010: 239)/'diasporic coming-of-age films' (2010: 240) as 'subgenres' of 'European youth cinema' (Berghahn 2010: 238), to referring to 'the coming-of-age genre' (Berghahn 2010: 251)²⁷. Similarly, whilst Dave draws meaningful connections between the European *Bildungsroman* and working-class *bildung* as depicted in contemporary British cinema, the parameters of his use of the coming-of-age film label are somewhat loose, moving between: films centring upon adolescent protagonists (*Trainspotting* [1996], *A Room for Romeo Brass* [1999], *Bullet Boy* [2004], *Green Street* [2005], *Kidulthood* [2006], *This is England* [2006], *Control* [2007], *Cass* [2008], *Slumdog Millionaire* [2008], *Somers Town* [2008] and *The Firm* [2009]); films revolving around adult

²⁷ Berghahn's formulation of the 'diasporic coming-of-age film' (2010: 241) is interrogated further in Chapter Five.

protagonists but also usually foregrounding adolescent characters (*The Firm* [1989], *I.D.* [1995], *Dead Man's Shoes* [2004], *The Football Factory* [2004], *Looking for Eric* [2009] and *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* [2012]); and films focused equally upon adult and adolescent protagonists (*Twenty Four Seven* [1997] and *Mischief Night* [2006]). In short, it would seem that when it comes to the deployment of the coming-of-age film tag, there is a lack of clarity and consensus.

Importantly, even a cursory Internet search reveals that the coming-of-age film label is common currency outside of academia, with definitions, recommendations and reviews aplenty. For example, TheSkyKid.com 'features articles and reviews of coming of age movies, music and books with a focus on adolescent development and on young people in the performing arts', and has an accompanying book entitled *Coming of Age Movies: Growing up on Screen* (Georgi Krastev 2011). And Wikipedia's entry for 'Coming-of-age films' has links to 'Coming-of-age films by country', 'Coming-of-age films based on actual events', 'Animated coming-of-age films', 'LGBT-related coming-of-age films', 'Harry Potter (film series)', 'Films Based on Tom Brown's Schooldays' and 'Treasure Island films' – to name but a few of the subcategories listed (Wikipedia 'Coming-of-age films'). Likewise, January 2015 saw BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* feature a section entitled 'Coming-of-Age Films', and the same station's *Front Row* include a discussion called 'Teen Film Tropes', with the participants using the terms 'teen film' and 'coming-of-age films' interchangeably, and broadcaster, editor, film producer and journalist Catherine Bray responding to the question of 'What defines a coming-of-age film?' with, 'I think one of the joys of the genre is that it's open to all sorts of interpretation. It's a film that has something meaningful to say about the adolescent experience'²⁸.

Further to this, Don Lort's *Coming of Age: Movie and Video Guide* (1997) – spanning the 1930s to the 1990s, and internationally-minded but dominated by American and Canadian fare – may be seen as an accompaniment to Considine's 'more academic outlook' (Lort 1997: 9). Whilst the age range of the protagonists under Lort's spotlight is 8-18, rather than Shary and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*'s 12-20, the WHO's 10-19, or my preference of 10-25, its IMDb-style of presentation and scope make it a helpful body of information – its introduction, for instance, offering up a definition of the coming-of-age film and some thoughts on its target audience:

'In simplest terms a coming of age story is one in which a child or a teenager reaches a critical turning point or event that results in a loss of childhood innocence. Not surprisingly, most often this turning point revolves around adolescent sexuality. ... Why this emphasis on sexuality? Simply because for most people, especially in our Western society, which lacks recognized rite of passage rituals which initiate the young person into adult society, the discovery of sexuality, in whatever form it takes, is

²⁸ 'Coming of Age Films' was first broadcast on 22nd January 2015 and featured Bray and Elizabeth Karlsen, co-founder of Number 9 Films and chair of Women in Film and Television, talking to presenter Jenni Murray. 'Teen Film Tropes' was first broadcast on 27th January 2015 and featured Charlie Lyne, film critic and writer and director of *Beyond Clueless* (2014), and Naomi Alderman, author and game designer, talking to presenter Samira Ahmed.

probably the quintessential coming of age experience. It is the one thing about growing up which truly separates the young child from the young adult. ... The other thing that ties all of these films together is that they are treated just as seriously as any adult film – the subject just happens to be children. For the most part, these are adult films made for adults. ... Adults who watch films about teenagers or children do so for any number of reasons. Some have professional interests: teachers, social workers and so on may find such films of more than passing interest. ... Nostalgia also plays an important part for many viewers' (7-10).

Similarly, an AS Film Studies text book, in a chapter entitled 'Passions and Repressions', presents a definition of the "'coming-of-age" film', before then focusing on *Beautiful Thing* (1996) and *My Summer of Love* (2004):

'Conventions of the 'coming of age' film

- The coming of age is a period of transition from 'childhood' to 'adulthood' which is characterised by the need to make decisions about the future – to do with family, friends, education, work, sexuality, etc.
- The time scale for taking these decisions is often a short period – such as a summer.
- 'Coming of age' films tend to rely on dialogue and emotion rather than physical action.
- The actual age of the central character can vary, but tends to be around mid-teen.
- The story is often told in flashback by the central character who is now older and wiser.
- The central character is usually male.

(Casey Benyahia, Gaffney and White 2006: 271).

Finally, and most recently, two pieces of scholarship on, respectively, 'the coming-of-age film in 1990s Irish cinema' and 'the coming of age film in Nordic cinema', indicate a growing disposition towards the use of the coming-of-age film label in academia. Claiming that Irish coming-of-age films of the 1990s explore the Irish identity and, in particular, the vacuum left by British colonialism and the influence of American cultural imperialism – with the older generation cast as a symbol of the past, and the younger generation represented as more progressive – Carlos Menendez-Otero asserts that a typical narrative consists of a conventional three acts. Firstly, it situates the adolescent protagonist within the context of a family in which the physical or psychological absence of a parent renders the group dysfunctional, leading the protagonist to seek refuge in an imaginary, infantile world based in American popular culture. Secondly, it introduces a stranger into the community. And thirdly, it sets the protagonist on the path to adulthood via their interactions with said stranger (2015: 12-13). Comparatively, Anders Lysne suggests a working definition of the coming-of-age genre and draws attention to key features of its specific manifestation in Nordic cinema. Citing Alistair Fowler's 'flexible approach to genre' – which invokes Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of 'family resemblances' by proposing that 'representations of a genre may be regarded as making up a category whose individual members are related in various ways, but without members necessarily having any one single feature shared in common by all' – Lysne contends that such a framework helps to account for thematic and stylistic diversity within the coming-of-age genre (2016: 130-131). And with regard to the Nordic coming-of-age film, he highlights three main trends: firstly, the way in which 'Scandinavian

coming of age films ... depict the child as a kind of involved onlooker', 'out of control of the action, even as the narrative is primarily anchored in their perspective' (Steene 1992 cited in Lysne 2016: 131-132); secondly, a penchant for combining female coming-of-age narratives with the genre conventions of the vampire film, the western, and the werewolf film, 'equipping the young female protagonists with character traits traditionally associated with masculinity such as physical strength and (sexual) aggression' (2016: 136); and thirdly, a crossing of the 'art film', a 'realist inclination', and a classical Hollywood narrative style, resulting in

'a certain kind of "serious" (as opposed to "comedic") film that combines the open endings, episodic structures and psychologically complex characters of the art film with the consistent form of the classical Hollywood genre film through clear-cut narrative conflicts and a style that predominantly emphasises plot elements of classical mainstream narration', thereby offering 'a moderately challenging yet accessible and often engaging aesthetic form', 'able to appeal commercially to a wide audience, as well as carrying a certain amount of "cultural value" in terms of critical reception and a frequent presence within an international film festival circuit' (2016: 134).

Situating itself in relation to the various suggested definitions of the coming-of-age film/genre and discussions of its manifestation in different national cinemas, this thesis offers its own advocacy of the coming-of-age film label and working definition of the coming-of-age genre. To begin with, in the same way that Driscoll feels that 'separating "teen" and "youth" film obscures the importance of their shared discourse on adolescence' (2011: 3), it is arguable that the terms 'teen film' and 'youth film' also unhelpfully blur the distinction between films with adolescent protagonists and films aimed at adolescents – the similar sound and thus potential conflation of 'teen film' and 'teenpics', a factor in this. Furthermore, as detailed in Chapter One, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'to come of age' as 'to attain adult age and status' or, 'in extended use', 'to reach full development or maturity', yet as evidenced earlier in this chapter, it is not uncommon for people to employ the adjectival form 'coming-of-age' to characterise films which portray the experience of adolescence more generally. That is, the coming-of-age film/drama/narrative/story/tale tag can already be seen to be used to denote films which depict the journey of adolescence in broad terms, not only films which bring their adolescent protagonists to 'adult age and status' or supposed 'full development or maturity'. And whilst the latter are undoubtedly a conspicuous brand of coming-of-age film – indeed, the kind that Berghahn's conception of the European 'diasporic coming-of-age film' (2010: 241) seems to be based upon – not all films that have been described as coming-of-age films/dramas/narratives/stories/tales possess affirmative and/or definitive conclusions, as demonstrated by Dave's discussion of working-class *bildung* in contemporary British cinema. Indeed, a contracted use of the coming-of-age film label to signify films with positive and/or unequivocal, but not pessimistic or ambivalent endings, is arguably tantamount to the commodification and perpetuation of a myth about what it means to 'grow up'. In short, then, it is proposed that replacing the names 'teen film' and 'youth film' with the moniker 'coming-of-age films' would better represent the content of films revolving around adolescent protagonists.

Although the phrase ‘to come of age’ and its variants may, admittedly, be used metaphorically to refer to a sense of evolutionary change in a person of any age or, even, in an organisation or a place, it is most commonly applied to the transition from childhood to adulthood and, as such, is an apt handle for films about this stage of life. After all, the *Bildungsroman* derives its appellation from the fact that it follows the *Bildung* (formation) of its protagonist and is a *Roman* (novel). Why not apply the same principle to films which deal with the coming-of-age process?

Further to this, it is suggested that deploying the coming-of-age film label to denote a genre, as opposed to a cycle, mode, movement, tradition or trend, is productive and should be encouraged – for although there is massive range in the concerns, plots and styles of films focusing on adolescent protagonists, key characteristics are unquestionably discernible, and examining this commonality does much to address a significant yet underappreciated strand of international cinema, as well as engender a fuller understanding of the relationship between adolescence and cinema. Crucially, a coming-of-age film can also be a comedy, a romantic comedy, a horror, etc.; the designation does not necessitate the rejection of all other classifications and, indeed, generic hybridity is prevalent. As Neale posits, ‘from a Derridean perspective, ... [a]ny film (like any text, utterance or instance of representation) can participate in several genres at once. In fact, it is more common than not for a film to do so’ (2000: 25). However, the crux of the matter is that whilst Shary and Berghahn choose to single out ‘subgenres’ of ‘youth/teen film’, this thesis proposes that: (a) the coming-of-age genre consists of stories about adolescence, inflected, variously, by other generic traits and/or particular formal and stylistic features, and in different national contexts; and (b) heterogeneity within the coming-of-age genre is counterbalanced by the repeated appearance of certain issues, character types, plot devices, and narrative arcs.

The Contemporary British Coming-of-Age Film

(i) A Question of Genre

To some, it may appear pedantic to reject Shary’s organisation of the ‘youth/teen film’ ‘genre’ into five ‘subgenres’, in favour of a framework which, firstly, swaps the term ‘youth/teen film’ for ‘coming-of-age film’, and secondly, identifies the coming-of age genre as ‘stories about adolescence’ which are ‘inflected, variously, by other generic traits and/or particular formal and stylistic features, and in different national contexts’ and marked by ‘the repeated appearance of certain issues, character types, plot devices, and narrative arcs’. However, it is imperative to remember that Shary is writing about the American film industry, with its well-oiled machine of Hollywood genre production, distribution and exhibition, and that British cinema is somewhat volatile in comparison. As Roy Stafford points out, although ‘there is certainly a tradition of genre production in Britain’, with ‘[t]he 1930s and the 1950s ... the strongest periods’, ‘[s]ince 1990, with no British studios as such,

genre production has been hard to find' (2005: 10-11). Likewise, whilst Peter Hutchings answers the question 'Is British cinema a genre cinema?' with, 'Even the most cursory review of the critical material produced on British cinema during the last twenty years suggests that it is', it is telling that he adds, 'at least to some extent' (forthcoming: 1). And analogously, James Leggott claims that 'the key genres of British cinema are difficult to fathom' and that 'this arises partly from the notoriously unstable and un-centralised nature of the native film industry' (2008: 54).

Fortunately, there have been some noble endeavours to pin down the major genres of British cinema. Marcia Landy argues that 1930-1960 is characterised by eight 'dominant British genres – historical films, films of empire, war films, women's films, melodramas, comedies, horror films, and social problem films' (1991: 14). And Sarah Street adds into the mix 'historical costume film', 'documentary realism', 'Free Cinema', 'crime films', 'thrillers', 'film noir', 'spiv films', 'science-fiction', 'kitchen sink dramas', 'spy films', 'pop musicals' and 'Swinging London films' when examining issues of genre in the same portion of the twentieth century – going on to explore increasing generic hybridity from the 1970s onwards (1997). Indeed, singling out the 1960s, Robert Murphy asserts that whilst '[c]ertain genres – costume films and war films – begin to look rather mangy in the 1960s' (1997: 6), there were 'crime films, horror films, comedies, spy films, science-fiction, musicals, youth films, and the cycle of films associated with Swinging London' (1997: 2) – with the 'three key genres' being 'horror, crime and comedy' (1997: 5).

Likewise, writing about the years 1997-2008, Leggott proposes

five broad and over-lapping areas ... where filmmaking activity and critical response (or neglect) have been the most pronounced: the horror film, the gangster film, the comedy and romantic comedy, the realist film and the history and costume film' (2008: 56)²⁹.

And pertinently, the *British Popular Series* from Routledge, the British multinational publisher, now comprises *British Crime Cinema* (Chibnall and Murphy 1999), *British Science Fiction Cinema* (Hunter 1999), *British Horror Cinema* (Chibnall and Petley 2001), *British Historical Cinema* (Monk and Sargeant 2002), *British Queer Cinema* (Griffiths 2006), *British Women's Cinema* (Bell and Williams 2009) and *British Comedy Cinema* (Hunter and Porter 2012). Furthermore, the BFI has made BFI and UKFC Statistical Yearbooks from 2002 onwards available on their website, and clarifying that their

'list of genres is based on conventions commonly used within the industry and by published sources such as the BFI's Collections Information Database, the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) and the Internet Movie Database (IMDb)' (BFI Statistical Yearbook 2014: 35),

²⁹ Leggott acknowledges that although a 'social realist tradition has long been recognised as a major strand of British filmmaking, ... the existence of a coherent realist genre is doubtful' and '[i]t is perhaps more appropriate to identify a realist impulse that continues to manifest itself through subject matter or form, or a combination of the two' (2008: 71-71).

itemises seventeen genres – action, adventure, animation, biopic, comedy, crime, documentary, drama, family, fantasy, horror, music/dance, romance, sci-fi, thriller, war and western.

However, as Berghahn's aforementioned work recognises, scholars have tended to approach European cinema in terms of *auteurs* and movements, and this is borne out in key publications on British cinema honing in on a tradition of realism, the place of art cinema, and matters of authorship. For example, in Hill's *British Cinema in the 1980s* (1999), the part entitled 'Contemporary Representations' (131-240) includes sections on 'Realism' (134-137), 'Social Art Cinema' (141-147), 'The Avant-Garde' (153-161), 'Mike Leigh and Ken Loach' (192-204), and 'Hanif Kureishi and Stephen Frears' (205-218). And consonantly, the second and third chapters of Jim Leach's *British Film* (2004) are called 'The Common Touch: The Art of Being Realistic' (48-65) and 'The Mirror Crack'd: British Expressionism' (66-85). Furthermore, scholarship on British cinema is distinguished by a tendency to examine film from a sociological angle, preoccupied especially with issues of class, gender and sexuality, and 'race' and ethnicity. Hill's aforementioned book, for instance, contains chapters on 'Class, Gender, and Working-Class Realism' (166-191), 'Class, Politics, and Gender' (192-204), '"Race" and Cultural Hybridity' (205-218), and '"Race" and the Politics of Form' (219-240). And correspondingly, Leggott's *Contemporary British Cinema: From Heritage to Horror* (2008) divides its chapter on 'Representing Contemporary Britain' (83-110) into sections on 'Sexuality' (84-88), 'Class' (88-96), 'Men' (96-100), 'Women' (100-104), and 'Ethnicity' (104-110).

Importantly, tension between an emphasis on directors, a focus on genres, and a concern with cycles, modes, movements, traditions and trends, is a familiar dynamic in Film Studies. Thus the variation of approach within the realm of scholarship on British cinema should perhaps be no surprise. Indeed, such diversity is represented well in books like *The British Cinema Book* (Murphy 2009), *Studying British Cinema: The 1990s* (Dyja 2010) and *Studying British Cinema: 1999-2009* (Fitzgerald 2010). However, it does complicate significantly the task of situating a formulation of the coming-of-age genre and discussion of its specific manifestation in contemporary British cinema.

Thankfully, Leggott and Hutchings provide constructive takes on the picture at hand. Leggott draws attention to 'a prestigious tradition of realist drama' which has led to 'the reworking of popular genres through realist strategies, and the energising of social realist films through the adoption of generic traits' (2008: 56). And Hutchings observes that 'analysis of British genre films often engages with them in ideological terms', 'aim[ing] to tease out the ways in which British genres offer imaginary resolutions to or troubled explorations of historically specific anxieties or problems within the lived experience of British audiences' (forthcoming: 10), and are allied to a sense that 'generic categories ... are permeable and rewritable, and films can accordingly be moved around to suit particular analytical aims' (forthcoming: 13) – 'a willingness', that is, 'to replace or ignore industrial

generic designations in favour of critically or theoretically generated generic categories' (forthcoming: 4), rendering genre 'predominantly a critical tool, a way of grouping films for the purposes of historical and ideological analysis' (forthcoming: 13). Indeed, it would appear that, with an 'upsurge of ... interest' in British cinema – chiefly, in the form of a 'plethora of journal articles, conferences, anthologies, monographs and PhD theses' (Leggott 2008: 10) – it has become more common to employ the concept of genre as a critical tool for drawing attention to lines of continuity that may not be necessarily aligned with industrial processes but, nevertheless, feel significant and worthy of exploration. For instance, Hutchings observes that 'Landy's book brings together genres that have some basis in industrial or popular categorisations ... with genres that exist more at the critically constructed end of the spectrum' (forthcoming: 7), and Belén Vidal begins *Heritage Film: Nation, Genre and Representation* (2012) by clarifying that the heritage film is a 'concept [that] has its roots in British film studies' (1), making it 'a "critically or theoretically constructed genre" rather than an industrial one (Neale 1990: 52)' (2). Understandably, Hutchings problematises this direction of travel by reminding the reader of Tom Ryall's 'classic statement' on genre:

'The master image for genre criticism is the triangle composed of artist/film/audience. Genres may be defined as patterns/forms/styles/structures which transcend individual films, and which supervise both their construction by the film maker, and their reading by an audience' (Ryall 1975: 28 cited in Hutchings forthcoming: 4).

And analogously, although Neale asserts that 'genres are simply types or kinds of films' (2000: 9), he also exercises caution by recommending that 'it is probably best to distinguish theoretical genres from genres proper by renaming the former "theoretical categories"' (2000: 43)³⁰. However, overall, Hutchings accepts that

'genre criticism has since generally moved beyond the idea of comprising closed systems of shared knowledge in favour of a model more open to the idea that over time genres will accumulate a varied range of definitions, interpretations and evaluations that have been produced by different groups of genre users, including critics and historians' (forthcoming: 4).

Equally, Neale concedes that 'further work in the area may be possible' (2000: 43), and Hutchings concludes that 'there is yet more to be discovered and yet more to be discussed' (forthcoming: 22).

In terms of how this thesis contributes to the debate about British genres, it follows Landy and Vidal's lead, hoping to persuade those who think of genres as principally industrially-generated products that there is significant merit in identifying films with adolescent protagonists as a genre, as opposed to talking of coming-of-age narratives/the portrayal of adolescence/the theme of coming of age/the treatment of the coming-of-age

³⁰ As exemplification, Neale cites the way in which Sylvia Lynne Foil's Ph.D. thesis (1991) promotes 'a "conceptual approach" to genre', discussing, as it does, 'a category of films she calls "the apocalyptic [sic]"' (2000: 43).

process in contemporary British cinema. In the same way that the editors of *British Women's Cinema* (2010), Bell and Williams, note a 'disavowal of a native tradition of British women's cinema', claiming that

'many female-centred films ... find themselves "swept under the umbrella of other film movements or genres (the wartime morale film, the New Wave film, the 'quality' literary adaptation) in order to fit them, however reductively, into a dominant scheme of national cinema"' (King 1996: 219 cited in Bell and Williams 2010: 5)

this thesis maintains that many adolescent-centred films have suffered a similar fate. Highlighting, for example, how *Brief Encounter* (1945) has been analysed as 'an example of "quality" realist cinema' and 'a masterpiece of "melodramatic emotionality" ... and "dramatic intensity"', and how *The Red Shoes* (1948) has been considered as a demonstration of 'the authorship and aestheticism of Powell and Pressburger', but how neither film has been scrutinised for the way in which it 'features a woman at the centre of its universe', Bell and Williams declare that 'placing [such films] in a continuum of British woman's films permits another way of interpreting them' (2010: 5-6)³¹. Inspired by this manoeuvre, this thesis advocates that such an angle be adopted for contemporary films which are set in Britain and revolve around an adolescent protagonist or a pair or group of adolescent protagonists. Just as Bell and Williams avow that films like *Brief Encounter* and *The Red Shoes* 'are not solely woman's films, but ... are also woman's films, and to fail to recognise that means ignoring a large part of their substance and their appeal' (2010: 6), it may be held that contemporary British coming-of-age films are not exclusively coming-of-age films, but that it is illuminating, important and interesting to focus on their representation of the passage from childhood to adulthood. For instance, whilst Bell and Williams label *A Room with a View* (1985), *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985), *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1987), *Wish You Were Here* (1987), *Emma* (1996), *Stella Does Tricks* (1996), *Elizabeth* (1998A), *The Land Girls* (1998), *Me Without You* (2001), *Anita and Me* (2002), *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), *I Capture the Castle* (2003), *My Summer of Love* (2004), *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) and *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* (2008) as British women's films, it is arguable that these titles also benefit from a critical approach that discusses them as contemporary British coming-of-age films.

(ii) Generic Hybridity

³¹ In similar fashion, Gateward and Pomerance bemoan the fact that 'in the history of cinematic production and critical study, no systematic critical attention has been given to the fact that six of the ten highest-grossing motion pictures of all time, adjusted for inflation, are principally about adolescent girls – either their experience or the treatment they receive in male culture': *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) is 'a musical fantasy about a poor girl who makes good in the woods'; *Gone with the Wind* (1939) is 'about a southern belle coming of age in the era of the Civil War'; *Doctor Zhivago* (1965) is 'about a pretty girl who inspires a tortured poet'; *The Sound of Music* (1965) is 'an account of the coming-of-age of a girl in the Nazi era at the hands of a young woman a little older but hardly more experienced than she is in the ways of the heart'; *Star Wars* (1977) is 'an epic about charming mercenaries who come to the aid of a forsaken adolescent princess'; and *Titanic* (1997) is 'an account of a girl's coming to terms with the social meaning of her gender onboard a fated ocean-going vessel' (2002: 14).

Before concluding this chapter with an outline of the main characteristics of the contemporary British coming-of-age film, it is important to put emphasis upon the generic hybridity of the body of work in question, in the form of both explicit crossbreeding and subtle interplay. Amongst the one hundred and seventy-eight films identified in this study, the coming-of-age process can be seen to be framed within some of the conventions of, for example: the biopic e.g. *Backbeat* (1994), *Elizabeth* (1998), *Control* (2007), *Nowhere Boy* (2009), *Toast* (2010), *Belle* (2014) and *Testament of Youth* (2014); the borstal/Young Offender Institution/prison film e.g. *Scum* (1979), *Made in Britain* (1983), *Borstal Boy* (2000) and *Starred Up* (2013); comedy, such as gross-out, parody and whimsy e.g. *That Sinking Feeling* (1979), *Kevin and Perry Go Large* (2000), *Popcorn* (2007), *Son of Rambow* (2007), *St Trinian's* (2007), *St Trinian's 2* (2009), *Anuvahood* (2011), *The Inbetweeners Movie* (2011) and *The Inbetweeners 2* (2014); comedy drama ('dramedy') e.g. *Gregory's Girl* (1981), *P'tang Yang Kipperbang* (1983), *Those Glory Glory Days* (1983), *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1987), *Wish You Were Here* (1987), *East is East* (1999), *Purely Belter* (2000), *Sixty Six* (2006), *Starter for Ten* (2006), *The History Boys* (2006), *Somers Town* (2008), *Submarine* (2010), *Queen and Country* (2014) and *Just Jim* (2015); comedy horror e.g. *Tormented* (2009) and *Love Bite* (2012); the crime thriller e.g. *The Fruit Machine* (1988), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), *The Hole* (2001), *London to Brighton* (2006) and 4.3.2.1. (2010); the dystopian film e.g. *Shopping* (1994) and *Shank* (2010); the fantasy film e.g. the Harry Potter franchise; the football hooligan film e.g. *Green Street* (2005), *Cass* (2008), *Awaydays* (2009) and *The Firm* (2009); heritage film e.g. *Another Country* (1984), *A Room with a View* (1985) and *Maurice* (1987); the hood film e.g. *Bullet Boy* (2004), *Kidulthood* (2006), *Adulthood* (2008), *Shank* (2009), *Shank* (2010), *Attack the Block* (2011), *Sket* (2011) and *My Brother the Devil* (2012); the musical e.g. *Absolute Beginners* (1986) and *Babymother* (1998); romantic comedy e.g. *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), *Emma* (1996) and *Pride and Prejudice* (2005); the sports film e.g. *There's Only One Jimmy Grimble* (2000), *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) and *Chalet Girl* (2011); the spy film e.g. *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2015); and the urban film, which overlaps with the football hooligan film and the hood film³² e.g. *Quadrophenia* (1979), *Babylon* (1980), *Absolute Beginners* (1986), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), *Small Faces* (1996), *Trainspotting* (1996), *This is England* (2006), *Fish Tank* (2009), *Neds* (2010) and *Sixteen* (2013).

Indeed, the previous section lists fifteen films which Bell and Williams identify as examples of *British Women's Cinema* (2009), but which this thesis argues are also fruitfully

³² 'Urban cinema' is an emerging category:

'Urban film has really only become a staple of British cinema in the last decade, in the aftermath of the widely successful *Kidulthood*, which in turn followed the critical success of *Bullet Boy*. British urban films often feature ostracised communities (usually black) suffering through hard economic times as violence pulsates in the background, and portray ostracised people who don't get seen in films. There are of course numerous exceptions to this, but at its core, British urban cinema is about black people and the oppressions they face on a day-to-day basis.

'Urban cinema originally found its home in the US in the early 1990s, with a wave of black directors such as Spike Lee, John Singleton, the Hughes Brothers and F Gary Gray producing numerous hits. And whilst there are British urban films that pre-date movies like *Do The Right Thing*, British urban cinema didn't become a 'thing' until the mid noughties. Featuring important themes such as poverty, economic segregation, racism, power structures and societal disillusion, urban film often acts as a voice for those deprived of one' (Moore 2015).

classified as coming-of-age films, and further to this, there is a conspicuous commonality between my filmography and the filmographies in the rest of the Routledge *British Popular Series*: *Shopping* (1994) has been catalogued under *British Crime Cinema* (Chibnall and Murphy 1999) and *British Science Fiction Cinema* (Hunter 1999); *The Hole* (2001) has been catalogued under *British Horror Cinema* (Chibnall and Petley 2001); *Quadrophenia* (1979), *Another Country* (1984), *A Room with a View* (1985), *Hope and Glory* (1987), *Maurice* (1987), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), *The Cement Garden* (1992), *Backbeat* (1993), *Elizabeth* (1998), *Velvet Goldmine* (1998), *The Land Girls* (1998) and *Billy Elliot* (2000) have been catalogued under *British Historical Cinema* (Monk and Sargeant 2002); *Scum* (1979), *Another Country* (1984), *My Beautiful Launderette* (1985), *Maurice* (1987), *Two of Us* (1987), *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* (1988), *Get Real* (1988), *The Fruit Machine* (1988), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), *The Long Day Closes* (1992), *Beautiful Thing* (1996), *Billy Elliot* (2000), *Borstal Boy* (2000) and *A.K.A.* (2002) have been catalogued under *British Queer Cinema* (Griffiths 2006); and *Gregory's Girl* (1981), *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1987), *Wish You Were Here* (1987), *Billy Elliot* (2000), *Kevin and Perry Go Large* (2000), *About a Boy* (2002), *Anita and Me* (2002), *Starter for Ten* (2006), *This is England* (2006), *St Trinian's* (2007), *St Trinian's 2* (2009), *Cemetery Junction* (2010), *Submarine* (2010), *Attack the Block* (2011) and *The Inbetweeners Movie* (2011) have been catalogued under *British Comedy Cinema* (Hunter and Porter 2012)³³. In addition, Higson's formulation of 'heritage film', a term which he uses interchangeably with 'costume drama' and 'period film'³⁴ (2003: 12), pertains to *Another Country* (1984), *A Room with a View* (1985) and *Maurice* (1987), whilst scholarship on the related categories of 'alternative heritage' (Powrie 2000: 316³⁵) and 'new heritage cinema' (Fitzgerald 2010: 47³⁶) considers *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* (1988), *The Long Day Closes* (1992) and *Small Faces* (1996) as examples of the former, and *About a Boy* (2002) and *Atonement* (2007) as

³³ Because there is no filmography for *British Comedy Cinema* (2012) I have taken relevant titles from the Index.

³⁴ Higson's primary material consists of 'films made in the 1980s and 1990s that either depict some aspect of the English past before the Second World War or are adapted from a canonical English literary text' (2003: 10).

³⁵ Powrie defines 'alternative heritage' as follows:

'First, they focus on working-class or lower-middle-class protagonists, unlike mainstream heritage, which tends to focus on the upper middle classes. Second, the films are located outside of the "centre", London, in the "provinces". ... Third, ... "alternative heritage" films disrupt the fiction ... by slowing or disrupting narrative ... and deflect[ing] us away from linear time to cyclical time, forcing us to focus on the production of memory as fiction rather than presenting memory as "real" ... Finally, these films are the site of the struggle between extreme and disruptive male violence, and a maternally-centred communal binding' (2000: 325-326).

³⁶ Fitzgerald proposes a connection between 'new heritage cinema' and '[t]he election of New Labour in 1997 with its modernist agenda and the continuing economic upturn of the late 1990s and early Noughties' (2010: 47). Specifically, he notes a continuation of practices associated with 'heritage film' – namely, 'a concentration on the *mise-en-scène*' (e.g. 'highly recognisable shots of London') and marketing that promotes 'a sense of the literary' – but also claims that this particular period saw an upsurge in the number of films set in present-day London and dealing with issues of 'class, cultural difference, sexual deceit and reconstituted family structures within a middle- or upper-middle-class framework' (2010: 47). In particular, he believes that 'new heritage cinema' deals in '[d]arker themes' than 'heritage film' of previous years, with 'seemingly perfect lives' (2010: 47) disrupted or exposed as far from perfect.

examples of the latter³⁷. Pertinently, too, Higson refers to *Absolute Beginners* (1986), *Wish You Were Here* (1987), *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), *The Long Day Closes* (1992), *Backbeat* (1994), *An Awfully Big Adventure* (1995), *The Young Poisoner's Handbook* (1995), *Small Faces* (1996), *Velvet Goldmine* (1998) and *East is East* (1999) as examples of 'costume drama' or 'period film' which are set between 1945 and 1960 and therefore fall outside of his area of enquiry (2003: 33-34).

With so many films under consideration, a comprehensive examination of generic hybridity has the potential to overwhelm both author and reader. For instance, a closer look at the labelling detailed above shows that three films which this thesis treats as coming-of-age films – *Another Country* (1984), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) and *Billy Elliot* (2000) – have, between them, already been slotted into no fewer than six other categories. All three have been classed as 'historical cinema' (Monk and Sargeant 2002) and 'queer cinema' (Griffiths 2006). *Another Country* (1984) has been classed as 'heritage film' (Higson 1993 and 2003). *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) has been classed as 'costume drama' or 'period film' (Higson 2003: 33-34). And *Billy Elliot* (2000) has been classed as 'comedy' (Hunter and Porter 2012). Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that both Powrie and Higson do not insist on exclusivity when it comes to matters of categorisation. Powrie's examination of *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988), *The Long Day Closes* (1992) and *Small Faces* (1996) as 'alternative heritage' goes hand in hand with his identification of these films as 'a ...category of historical film, the rite of passage film set in the past' (2000: 316)³⁸. And Higson acknowledges that 'some' of the films that he has grouped together 'have also been discussed under the more general rubrics of the woman's picture, the art-house film, and the quality film' (2003: 9). In short, the issue of genre is far from straightforward, and although an attempt to unpick the combination of different generic conventions in all of the films under consideration would undoubtedly shed significant light upon the body of work at hand, it would also be incredibly complicated and notably longwinded. Shary may make the straightforward claim that American cinema from 1980 to 1999 produced five main 'subgenres' of 'youth cinema' – the school film, the youth/teen delinquency film, the youth/teen horror film, the youth/teen science film, and the youth/teen love/sex film – and Berghahn may follow suit by classifying 'the diasporic youth film' (2010: 235), 'the diasporic coming-of-age film' (2010:

³⁷ Another related category is 'post-heritage film', which Monk defines as 'an emerging strand of period/literary films with a deep self-consciousness about how the past is represented' (1995: 33). More specifically, she asserts:

'What most unites the post-heritage films is undoubtedly an overt concern with sexuality and gender, particularly non-dominant gender and sexual identities: feminine, non-masculine, mutable, androgynous, ambiguous. ... But paradoxically the post-heritage films revel in the visual pleasures of heritage, even as they seem to distance themselves' (1995: 33).

³⁸ It is interesting to note that not only are *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988), *The Long Day Closes* (1992), and *Small Faces* (1996) classified by Powrie as 'historical films', 'rite of passage films', and 'alternative heritage', and by Higson as 'costume dramas' or 'period films', but that whilst Powrie is happy to call these semi-autobiographical films set in the past 'historical films', Higson avoids using such a label (2003: 12). Specifically, Higson points out that although 'it has become conventional to make a distinction between the historical film and the costume drama', with the latter 'reserved for films that present fictional characters in historical settings', the 'distinction ... seems ... difficult to maintain' (2003: 12).

241)³⁹, 'the hood film'⁴⁰, 'the juvenile delinquency ("J.D.") film' (2010: 237), 'the high-school film'⁴¹, 'rebellious and delinquent youth films'⁴², 'coming-of-age narratives' (2010: 238), 'coming-of-age films' (2010: 239)⁴³, and 'the *banlieue* film'⁴⁴ (2010: 238) as 'subgenres' of 'youth cinema', but it may be posited that such a framework fails to register fully enough the complexity of generic hybridity that occurs in films revolving around an adolescent protagonist or a pair or group of adolescent protagonists. Indeed, Berghahn herself recognises that not only has 'the hood film ... had a discernible influence on diasporic youth films', but 'the hood film' itself brings together conventions of 'the juvenile delinquency ("J.D.") film' and 'black action films' (2010: 237). And in later work, she asserts of *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) and *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002), that whilst the former 'blends generic features of the thriller, the music film, the urban youth film and queer cinema', the latter 'fuses the generic conventions of (romantic) comedy, sports film and coming-of-age film' (2013: 40).

Nevertheless, if there is any one particular genre that stands out as being especially important to the contemporary British coming-of-age film, it is the social problem film, or more accurately, the manifestation of the social problem film in British cinema. Hutchings may imply that it is a somewhat disputed generic category, claiming that Hill discusses it 'in thematic rather than generic terms' (forthcoming: 8), but Stafford remarks that the social problem film and the 'youth picture' are 'often the same film!' (2005: 11), and Hill and Landy's work bears this out, making it a critical consideration.

More specifically, Hill shows that the social problem film was one of the defining features of the so-called British New Wave, and points out that a good many of the films under his scrutiny tackled the topic of adolescence:

'One of the striking characteristics of the British cinema towards the end of the 1950s was its increasing concern to deal with contemporary social issues. Although individual examples of such films appeared earlier, it was in the period 1956-63 that this type of film became most prominent and topics such as juvenile delinquency, prostitution, homosexuality and race became standard preoccupations. The problem of youth was well ahead in this respect, giving rise to such titles as *The Blue Lamp* (1950), *I Believe in You* (1952), *Cosh Boy* (1953), *My Teenage Daughter* (1956), *It's Great to*

³⁹ Berghahn lists a number of European films that she believes count as 'diasporic youth film'. For example: 'British Asian films include *East is East* (1999), *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) and *Anita and Me* (2002); 'black British films' include *Rage* (1999), *Bullet Boy* (2004) and *Pressure* (1976); 'Turkish German features' include *Yasemin* (1988) and *Karamuk* (2004); and 'Maghrebi French films include' *Le thé au harem d'Archimède/Tea in the Harem* (1985) and *Le grand voyage/The Great Journey* (2004) (2010: 235).

⁴⁰ Examples of 'the hood film' include *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) and *Menace II Society* (1993) (Berghahn 2010: 237).

⁴¹ Examples of 'the [European] high-school film' include *If* (1968), *Another Country* (1984), and *The History Boys* (2006) (Berghahn 2010: 238).

⁴² Examples of 'rebellious and delinquent [European] youth films' include *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) and *Trainspotting* (1996) (Berghahn 2010: 238).

⁴³ Examples of European 'coming-of-age narratives' include *Les quatre cents coups/The 400 Blows* (1959), *Kes* (1969) and *Billy Elliot* (2000) (Berghahn 2010: 238).

⁴⁴ Examples of 'the *banlieue* film' include *La Haine/Hate* (1995) and *Rai* (1995) (Berghahn 2010: 237).

be Young (1956), *Violent Playground* (1957), *The Young and the Guilty* (1958), *Too Young to Love* (1959), *Serious Charge* (1959), *No Trees in the Street* (1959), *Beat Girl* (1959), *Linda* (1960), *So Evil So Young* (1960), *Spare the Rod* (1961), *Some People* (1962), *Term of Trial* (1962), *The Boys* (1962), *The Wild and the Willing* (1962), *The Leather Boys* (1963), *That Kind of Girl* (1963), *The Yellow Teddybears* (1963), *The Party's Over* (1963) and *A Place to Go* (1963)' (1986: 67).

To be precise, in an era of moral panics about the increasing number of women in work, a rising divorce rate, the 'invention' of the 'teenager', the leisure pursuits and spending habits of working-class youth, immigration, same-sex relationships, and sex work, young people came to be generally perceived as at-risk and/or incongruous with the adult world: 'youth became the focus of ... social anxiety, focusing, in displaced form, society's "quarrel with itself"' (Hill 1986: 16⁴⁵), and in particular, '[t]he teenager often provided the convenient scapegoat for ... anxieties by condensing the dangers of immorality and breakdown into a readily identifiable form' (Hill 1986: 124). At the same time, such subject matter was working its way into British cinema, contributing to the moral panics. Revealing how social problem films adhered to a classical narrative paradigm of equilibrium → disequilibrium → equilibrium – basically, a problem-solving structure⁴⁶ – and how this invariably took the form of a story that pitted a deviant individual against mainstream society – with the individual's 'personal qualities or attributes', and not 'the social structure', portrayed as at fault (1986: 56) – Hill testifies that, overall, there was an alignment of the social problem film with the "'problem of youth"' (1986: 16⁴⁷), and that a favouring of socially conservative endings was conspicuously indicative of an impulse to induct young people into the ways of the parent culture, as opposed to anything more progressive (1986: 54-56). There may have been a subtle distinction between endings which stressed 'the re-establishment of social order' and those which highlighted 'the achievement of social integration', with the former 'more hard-hat and conservative, underscoring the demand for punishment and discipline', and the latter a 'more liberal, social-democratic form of problem filmmaking, emphasising a capacity for social absorption' (1986: 56), but as a general rule of thumb, the 'social problem' of the social problem film was usually a youth who was 'a problem for society, rather than of it' (Hill 2006: 56).

On a similar tack, whilst Landy's research makes it clear that a preoccupation with the behaviour of young people does not extend to all social problem films, disaffected youth and juvenile delinquency unequivocally loom large as subject matter. One of her chapter's sections is entitled 'Youthful Rebellion: The Young Male', and another, 'Troubled and

⁴⁵ The internal quotation is taken from *Resistance through Rituals* (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts 1975: 21).

⁴⁶ The idea that '[a]n ideal narrative moves from a first state of equilibrium, to a state of disequilibrium, to a second state of equilibrium, is borrowed from Tzvetan Todorov (*The Poetics of Prose* 1977: 111), but Hill also cites Seymour Chatman's view that 'there is always a sense, in the traditional narrative, ... of "things being worked out in some way"' (*Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* 1980: 48), and Thomas Elsaesser's opinion that 'an ideology of "affirmation"' (Hill 1986: 55) or 'a kind of *a priori* optimism' ('The Pathos of Failure: American Films in the 70s' in *Monogram* October 1975: 14) is one of the 'characteristic conventions of narrativity' (1986: 55).

⁴⁷ Hill does not specify the source of this internal quotation.

Rebellious Young Females', and discussing how social problem films of the 1940s and 1950s often concerned 'young offenders, both male and female' (1991: 442), she highlights a singular obsession with 'an opposition between law enforcement officials working for the restoration of familial values and young women in quest of pleasure' (1991: 452). Significantly, too, quoting Iain Chambers, a 'critic' (1991: 442) of popular culture who was linked to the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, she engages with an idea that was central to their work:

'The rise of youth cultures seemed to us one of the most distinctive – indeed, "spectacular" – aspects of contemporary British culture, and thus of the process of post-war social and cultural change which was inscribed as a privileged object of study and theorising at the inception of the Centre's work. As it was widely phrased at the time, youth was "a metaphor for social change"' (Hall and Jefferson 2006: viii).

There is a clear overlap in the basic subject matter of the social problem film, as characterised by Hill and Landy, and the contemporary British coming-of-age film. Narratives about youth subcultures/countercultures, criminality, violence, promiscuity and prostitution cross the categories, despite appearing in different eras. Subcultures/countercultures are showcased in *Quadrophenia* (1979), *Babylon* (1980), *Absolute Beginners* (1986), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), *Trainspotting* (1996) and *This is England* (2006). Gang culture – typically involving illegal drugs and knife and gun crime – is illustrated in *Small Faces* (1996), *Bullet Boy* (2004), *Kidulthood* (2006), *Adulthood* (2008), *Shank* (2009), *Neds* (2010), *Shank* (2010), *Attack the Block* (2011), *Sket* (2011) and *My Brother the Devil* (2012). Football hooliganism is depicted in *Green Street* (2005), *Cass* (2008), *Awaydays* (2009) and *The Firm* (2009). Young female prostitutes are portrayed in *Stella Does Tricks* (1996) and *London to Brighton* (2006). And wayward girls take centre stage in *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1987), *Wish You Were Here* (1987), *Under the Skin* (1997), *My Summer of Love* (2004), *Kidulthood* (2006) and *Fish Tank* (2009). Indeed, although – as the remaining chapters demonstrate – the contemporary period has seen a discernible movement away from the conservative and simplistic conclusions of the social problem film of the so-called British New Wave, it may be argued that the films identified by Hill and Landy are early examples of British coming-of-age films in as much that they focus in on adolescent life and frame adolescent development as at odds with mainstream society in much the same way that the films discussed in the remaining chapters do. Either way, the social problem film is undeniably locatable in the genealogy of the contemporary British coming-of-age film.

(iii) Key Conventions

This thesis posits that, in a nutshell, a contemporary British coming-of-age film revolves around an individual adolescent protagonist or a pair or group of adolescent protagonists, and is set in Britain and made from 1979 onwards. Naturally, the decision to concentrate upon films set in Britain is open to debate, as films with British directors, screenwriters, cast members, etc. and/or a level of British funding are also important features in the landscape of British cinema. For example, it is interesting to note that whilst

the Harry Potter films are set in Britain, made in Britain by a predominantly British personnel, and ‘effortlessly experienced as British by Anglo-Saxon audiences attuned to their cultural signals’ (Narval Media/Birkbeck College/Media Consulting Group 2009: 64), they are ‘officially UK-US co-productions, financed and owned by a US studio’ (Narval Media/Birkbeck College/Media Consulting Group 2009: 12), and ‘non-Anglo audiences focus instead on the scale and production values and identify them more readily as American’ (Narval Media/Birkbeck College/Media Consulting Group 2009: 64). However, because this thesis is underpinned by an interest in cinematic representations of adolescent life in Britain, it is logical to make the choice of setting a key consideration in the determination of research parameters.

Further to this, as delineated in previous sections, a contemporary British coming-of-age film may be generically mixed and/or possess formal and stylistic features which align it with a certain cycle, mode, movement, tradition or trend. Indeed, as demonstrated in the previous section, a number of the films in question have already been identified as belonging to another generic category, and as detailed in the following chapter, British cinema’s longstanding tradition of social or working-class realism finds substantial expression in the stories of boyhood. Nevertheless, this thesis contends that significant lines of continuity cut across the manifold concerns, generic hybridity, and formal and stylistic diversity of the films at hand – that there is a coherence resembling a generic framework – and it is towards this which the thesis now turns.

To begin with, the contemporary British coming-of-age film may be an adaptation of a literary text (usually a ‘classic’ or ‘quality’ *Bildungsroman*/novel or play) or an original screenplay, and in both cases, it may be autobiographical, semi-autobiographical, biographical or fictional. Either way, like the *Bildungsroman*, it depicts the protagonist in ‘the process of becoming’ (Bakhtin 2006: 19-20) – in a state of change, development, evolution, growth, metamorphosis, transformation, transition – specifically, as they negotiate the pathway from childhood to adulthood. As Hardcastle, Morosini and Tarte put it, the adolescent protagonist comes to ‘a new awareness of themselves and their world’ (2009: 1). Furthermore, whilst the contemporary British coming-of-age film may focus upon either an individual male or female adolescent protagonist, or a pair or group of male, female or mixed gender adolescent protagonists, again like the *Bildungsroman*, it typically centres upon a white heterosexual male, with stories of females, homosexual males, and minority ethnic males and females constituting prominent but smaller strands within the body of work in question.

On one level, the basic mechanics of the contemporary British coming-of-age film are much the same as those observed in manifestations of the coming-of-age genre in other national cinemas. Firstly, as emphasised by Considine (1985), Lort (1997) and Shary (2002), the pains and pleasures of puberty and emerging sexuality tend to loom large thematically and are often drawn as integral to adolescent identity formation. Secondly, as highlighted

by Berghahn (2010), generational conflict usually provides one of the main sources of dramatic tension, with parents and teachers normally cast as at odds with the protagonist(s) and their peers. Thirdly, although adult figures are routinely positioned as obstructive, neglectful or, indeed, harmful forces, some of them, alternatively, resemble mentors who, in some cases, evolve in their own way too. Fourthly, in accordance with the view of adolescence as ‘a *psychosocial moratorium*’ (Erikson 1968: 156) or period of ‘liminality’ (Turner 1970), there is invariably an emphasis upon discovery and experimentation, which is allied to a sense of augmented autonomy. Fifthly, in correspondence with Arnold van Gennep (2010), Victor Turner (1970) and Bruce Lincoln’s (1981) work on rites of passage, spatial dislocation – sometimes framed within the context of a (summer) holiday or a road-trip – is frequently shown to be intrinsic to growth, with the parochialism and slow pace of small-town life and, in particular, suburbia, customarily contrasted with either the diversity and vitality of city life, or a sense of release in open and unstructured spaces in the countryside. Sixthly, voiceover is sometimes used to reveal a protagonist’s reflection upon the changes that they are going through, with the device more likely to feature in an adaptation of a novel, and most films opting for an opening and closing, as opposed to continual, commentary. And finally, the drama is typically punctuated by pivotal points in its protagonist’s/protagonists’ progress, driving forward the character development that lays at the heart of the coming-of-age narrative, as it does the *Bildungsroman*. For instance, a common method for conveying maturation is to depict activities that are rites of passage of sorts in Western culture, such as having one’s first kiss, losing one’s virginity, getting one’s first girlfriend or boyfriend, getting drunk for the first time, trying smoking and illegal drugs, adopting a ‘look’, gaining educational qualifications, travelling on one’s own or with friends, and moving out of the family home. And certain aesthetic strategies designed to accentuate transformational moments are repeated across a number of films, such as the employment of: unusual (e.g. jarring or striking) camera movements and/or cuts; slow-motion; freeze frames; heightened colouring and/or lighting; music and/or other sound effects; and montages that bring together important stages in the protagonist’s journey/protagonists’ journeys.

However, it is essential to recognise that contemporary British cinema is a component of what Stuart Hall calls the ‘discourse’ of British ‘national culture’ or the ‘*narrative of the nation*’ – which is ‘a set of stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols and rituals which stand for, or *represent*, the shared experiences, sorrows, and triumphs and disasters which give meaning to the nation’ (1992a: 292-293) – and that accordingly, as is the case with manifestations of the coming-of-age genre in other national cinemas, the contemporary British coming-of-age film possesses its own national character. More specifically, contemporary British cinema is marked by a particular concern for matters of personal, social and cultural identity – especially in terms of gender, sexual orientation, ‘race’ and ethnicity, and class – and crucially, this tendency can be seen to manifest itself in a significant number of coming-of-age films. As Hill claims, ‘much of what

was distinctive about British cinema in the 1980s was precisely the way in which it responded to the social changes around it and sought to address contemporary social and cultural developments': 'the cinema became involved in a cultural politics of "identity" and "difference" and, in doing so, sought to negotiate the complex terrain of class, gender, sexual orientation, "race", and nationality during this period' (Hill 1999: xi-xii). Analogously, Dave notes the 'relatively recent emergence of a more inclusive British cinema ... in which essentialised identities of ethnicity, gender, nation and sexuality have become deconstructed so that their internal contradictions, conflicts and differences become visible and significant' (2006: 13). And similarly, Berghahn's discussion of migrant and diasporic contemporary European cinema highlights 'multi-dimensional and fluid identities on screen, challenging essentialising conceptions not only of race and ethnicity but frequently also of gender and sexuality' (2013: 40). In line with this, the contemporary British coming-of-age film is – as detailed in the remaining chapters – inflected differently depending upon not only whether the protagonist is/protagonists are in their early, middle or late adolescence, but also whether they are male, female, heterosexual, homosexual, working-class, middle-class, upper-class, or from a particular minority 'racial' and/or ethnic background. Moreover, as borne out by Berghahn's conception of the 'diasporic coming-of-age film' in European cinema (2010: 241) and Dave's examination of working-class *bildung* in contemporary British cinema (2013), many narratives would appear to be not only conscious of, but veritably set out to interrogate the various ways in which issues of gender, sexual orientation, 'race' and ethnicity, and class can and often intersect to shape the coming of-age process – with a pronounced concern for the kinds of social, cultural and economic restrictions experienced by those who are female, homosexual, working-class, or from a minority 'racial' and/or ethnic background.

Taking this further, some contemporary British coming-of-age films may be said to embody Moretti's idea that, in the European *Bildungsroman*, '[y]outh acts as a kind of *symbolic concentrate* of the uncertainties and tensions of an entire cultural system, and the hero's growth becomes the narrative convention or *fictio* that permits the exploration of conflicting values' (2000: 185). Amongst the films at hand, a range of protagonists and their situations are drawn as representative of wider aspects of Britain's social, cultural, political and economic life, with a protagonist's progress or, indeed, lack of it not only situated within, but also serving as a metaphor for social, cultural, political and economic developments. Indeed, this is particularly the case in some of the films set in the past, where the protagonist is placed between two eras, echoing Mikhail Bakhtin's notion that the *Bildungsroman* portrays a type of 'human emergence' which 'reflects the historical emergence of the world itself': 'He is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other. This transition is accomplished in him and through him' (2006: 23). That is, in some of these narratives, the protagonist is cast as a distinctly progressive figure – an agent of renewal and an avatar of the future.

Lastly, in the same way that Moretti divides the European *Bildungsroman* into three groups – ‘classical’, ‘new’ or ‘realistic’, and ‘late’ (2000) – it may be argued that three main types of trajectory are discernible in the contemporary British coming-of-age film. Firstly, the ‘classical’ mode is echoed in those films in which the protagonists are shown to experience successful individualisation and socialisation – their journeys concluding on a note of betterment, conquest, empowerment and, not uncommonly, upwards social mobility (ref. Berghahn [2010]). Secondly, in a similar vein to the ‘late’ mode’, some films take their protagonists on a downwards spiral of alienation, capitulation, compromise, confusion, corruption, disappointment, disillusionment and social immobility (ref. Dave [2013]). And thirdly, as with the ‘new’ or ‘realistic’ mode, some protagonists are left in a state of ambivalence, with gains and losses counterbalanced, and the future looking potentially brighter but uncertain. In addition, it is worth noting that: the first kind tends to be marketed for mainstream and international audiences; the second typically manifests itself in films influenced by British cinema’s longstanding tradition of social or working-class realism; and the third is usually seen in films of an art cinema persuasion.

It can be seen, then, that whilst the contemporary British coming-of-age film is likely to be generically mixed and/or possess formal and stylistic features which align it with a certain cycle, mode, movement, tradition, trend, there are clear consistencies across the body of work in question, in spite of the apparent diversity. Some of the lines of continuity are observable in manifestations of the coming-of-age genre in other national cinemas, but others are particular to contemporary British cinema, and it is this specificity which is explored further in the remaining chapters.

Chapter Three

Boyhood in Contemporary British Cinema

Common Configurations

As with the *Bildungsroman*, the protagonist of a contemporary British coming-of-age film is typically a heterosexual adolescent male. Homosexual adolescent male protagonists and adolescent female protagonists have – as demonstrated in this chapter and the next – become more conspicuous in the period upon which this thesis concentrates, but it is critical to note that the ratio of heterosexual adolescent male protagonists to homosexual adolescent male protagonists stands at about 10:1, and the ratio of adolescent male protagonists to adolescent female protagonists, at about 2:1, making it arguable that the tale of the heterosexual adolescent male protagonist constitutes the prototype of the contemporary British coming-of-age film. Indeed, Powrie's conceptualisation of 'alternative heritage' in British cinema leads him to conclude that '[t]he majority of ... rite of passage films are boy-centred' (2000: 317), and Leggott not only observes that 'the frequent deployment of young boys as central characters' is one of the 'discernible tendencies of British filmmaking of the last ten or so years' (2004: 163) – which he exemplifies with reference to *Ratcatcher* (1999), *Billy Elliot* (2000) and *Gabriel and Me* (2001) – but also posits, more generally, that 'British cinema is ... dominated by narratives of male experience and endeavour' (2008: 96).

About two-thirds of contemporary British coming-of-age films with male protagonists revolve around an individual and, naturally, the age of the individual differs from film to film, with the youngest, Paul (Harry Eden) of *Pure* (2002), only ten years old, and the oldest, Art (Robert Pattinson) of *How To Be* (2008), 'going through some quarter-life crisis'. Moreover, there is a fairly even spread of stories of early, middle and late adolescence, and a handful of dramas bridging two or more of these phases, such as: the child-to-adult narratives of the Harry Potter series (2001-2011), *Cass* (2008) and *Great Expectations* (2011); the adolescent-to-adult narratives of *Maurice* (1987), *Billy Elliot* (2000) and *Care* (2000); and *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (2005), *Neds* (2010) and *Toast* (2010), which focus, respectively, upon Tom Brown (Alex Pettyfer) from the age of eleven to mid-adolescence, John McGill (Gregg Forrester/Connor McCarron) from the end of his primary school education to the latter part of his secondary school education, and Nigel Slater (Oscar Kennedy/Freddie Highmore) between the ages of nine and seventeen. More specifically, in terms of early adolescence: the second half of *Cider with Rosie* (1998) shows Laurie Lee (Joe Roberts) between the ages of ten and twelve; Edward (Bill Milner) of *Is Anybody There?* is ten years old; Bud (Leigh McCormack) of *The Long Day Closes* (1992), Taliesin Jones (John-Paul Macleod) of *The Testimony of Taliesin Jones* (2000), and Jimmy

Spud (Sean Landless) of *Gabriel and Me* (2001) are eleven years old; James Gillespie (William Eadie) of *Ratcatcher* (1999) and Shaun Field (Thomas Turgoose) of *This is England* (2006) are twelve years old; David Wiseman (Sam Smith) of *Wondrous Oblivion* (2003) celebrates his twelfth birthday, and Bernie Reubens (Gregg Sulkin) of *Sixty-Six* (2006), his bar mitzvah; and Alan Duckworth (John Albasiny) of *P'tang Yang Kipperbang* (1982) is fourteen years old. Meanwhile, when it comes to mid-adolescence: Tom (Freddie Cunliffe) of *The War Zone* (1999), Jimmy Grimble (Lewis McKenzie) of *There's Only One Jimmy Grimble* (2000), and Oliver Tate (Craig Roberts) of *Submarine* (2010) are fifteen years old; Trevor (Tim Roth) of *Made in Britain* (1983), Brendan Behan (Shawn Hatosy) of *Borstal Boy* (2000), and Goob Taylor (Liam Walpole) of *The Goob* (2014) are sixteen years old; Jack (Andrew Roberts) of *The Cement Garden* (1993), Liam (Martin Compston) of *Sweet Sixteen* (2002), and Jumah (Roger Jean Nsengiyumva) of *Sixteen* (2013) turn sixteen; Buddy Clarke (Chesney Hawkes) of *Buddy's Song* (1991), Ben Marshall (Rupert Grint) of *Driving Lessons* (2006), and Jo McCain (Martin Compston) of *Soulboy* (2010) are seventeen years old; Dean Page (Matthew Leitch) of *A.K.A.* (2002) and Bill Rohan (Callum Turner) of *Queen and Country* (2014) are eighteen years old; and seeming to be of a similar age are Carlin (Ray Winstone) of *Scum* (1979), Gregory Underwood (John Gordon Sinclair) of *Gregory's Girl* (1981), John Lennon (Aaron Johnson) of *Nowhere Boy* (2009), Dom (Calum MacNab) of *The Firm* (2009), and Jim of *Just Jim* (2015). Lastly, under the umbrella of late adolescence: Charles Highway (Dexter Fletcher) of *The Rachel Papers* (1989), Jamie/'Rage' (Fraser Ayres) of *Rage* (1999), Paul Carty (Nicky Bell) of *Awaydays* (2009), Cal (Wayne Virgo) of *Shank* (2009), Eric Love (Jack O'Connell) of *Starred Up* (2013), and Gary 'Eggsy' Unwin (Taron Egerton) of *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2015) are nineteen years old; and looking as if they belong in the same age bracket are Jimmy Cooper (Phil Daniels) of *Quadrophenia* (1979), David/'Blue' of *Babylon* (1980), Safed/'Zaf' Ayub (Naveen Andrews) of *Wild West* (1992), Billy McKenzie (Jude Law) of *Shopping* (1994), Nicholas Nickleby (Charlie Hunnam) of *Nicholas Nickleby* (2002), Matt Buckner (Elijah Wood) of *Green Street* (2005), Karim Azad (Sacha Dhawan) of *Bradford Riots* (2006), Brian Jackson (James McAvoy) of *Starter for Ten* (2006), Ian Curtis (Sam Riley) of *Control* (2007), Danny (Jack Ryder) of *Popcorn* (2007), Sam Peel (Noel Clarke) of *Adulthood* (2008), Art (Robert Pattinson) of *How To Be* (2008), Kenneth/'K' O'Sullivan-Fletcher (Adam Deacon) of *Anuvahood* (2011), and Ashiq/'Ash' Khan (James Floyd) of *Everywhere and Nowhere* (2011).

Whilst the contemporary British coming-of-age film typically privileges the individual adolescent male protagonist, the pairing of two adolescent male protagonists of about the same age is a key variation, taking the form of either a close friendship whose dynamics are intrinsic to each boy's experience of growing up – the adolescent version of the buddy movie or 'bromance' perhaps – as exemplified in *Another Country* (1984), *Backbeat* (1994), *A Room for Romeo Brass* (1999), *Kevin and Perry Go Large* (2000), *Purely Belter* (2000), *Son of Rambow* (2007), *Somers Town* (2008), *Cherrybomb* (2009) and *The Selfish Giant* (2013), or an intimate relationship between two boys or young men, as seen in *My Beautiful*

Launderette (1985), *Two of Us* (1987), *The Fruit Machine* (1988), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), *Beautiful Thing* (1996), *Get Real* (1999) and *The Pass* (2016). Again, the stories encompass early to late adolescence: Will Proudfoot (Bill Milner) and Lee Carter (Will Poulter) of *Son of Rambow* (2007) seem to be in either the first or second year of secondary school, placing them somewhere between the ages of eleven and thirteen; Romeo Brass (Andrew Shim) and Gavin/'Knocks' Woolley (Ben Marshall) of *A Room for Romeo Brass* (1999) are twelve years old; Arbor (Conner Chapman) and Swifty (Shaun Thomas) of *The Selfish Giant* (2013) are thirteen years old; Kevin (Harry Enfield) and Perry (Kathy Burke) of *Kevin and Perry Go Large* (2000), Gerry McCarten (Chris Beattie) and Sewell (Greg McLane) of *Purely Belter* (2000), Tomo (Thomas Turgoose) and Marek (Piotr Jagiello) of *Somers Town* (2008), and Malachy McKinny (Rupert Grint) and Luke (Robert Sheehan) of *Cherrybomb* (2009) appear to be fifteen or sixteen years old; Eddie (Emile Charles) and Michael (Tony Forsyth) of *The Fruit Machine* (1988), and Jamie Gangel (Glen Berry) and Ste Pearce (Scott Neal) of *Beautiful Thing* (1996) are sixteen years old; Guy Bennett (Rupert Everett) and Tommy Judd (Colin Firth) of *Another Country* (1984), Matthew (Jason Rush) and Phil (Lee Whitlock) of *Two of Us* (1987), and Steven Carter (Ben Silverstone) and John Dixon (Brad Gorton) of *Get Real* (1999) are between sixteen and eighteen years old; Jason (Russell Tovey) and Ade (Arinzé Kene) of *The Pass* (2016) are nineteen years old in the first of the film's three acts; Stuart Sutcliffe (Stephen Dorff) and John Lennon (Ian Hart) of *Backbeat* (1994) are shown between the ages of nineteen and twenty-one; and Omar Ali (Gordon Warnecke) and Johnny Burfoot (Daniel Day-Lewis) of *My Beautiful Launderette* (1985), and Caz (Mo'Sesa) and Chris (Valentine Nonyela) of *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) look to be in their late adolescence. Furthermore, another type of pair that provides diversification is the configuration of two brothers. The 'twins' of *Twin Town* (1997), Jeremy and Julian Lewis (Rhys and Llyr Ifans), not actually twins, but brothers in their late adolescence. *Gone Too Far* (2013) follows early twenty-something Yemi (Malachi Kirby) and his estranged older brother Iku (OC Ukeje). And *Bullet Boy* (2004), *Shank* (2010) and *My Brother the Devil* (2012) explicitly interweave the lives of, respectively, twelve-year-old Curtis (Luke Fraser) and nineteen-year-old Ricky (Ashley Walters), fourteen-year-old Junior (Kedar Williams-Stirling) and twenty-four-year-old Rager (Ashley Bashy Thomas), and sixteen-year-old Mo (Fady Elsayed) and nineteen-year-old Rashid (James Floyd)⁴⁸.

In addition to these innovations, it is also worth drawing attention to the use of an ensemble cast consisting of three or more adolescent male protagonists, which is applicable to *That Sinking Feeling* (1979), *Small Faces* (1996), *Twenty Four Seven* (1997), *The History Boys* (2006), *Cemetery Junction* (2010), *Attack the Block* (2011), *The Inbetweeners Movie* (2011), *Love Bite* (2012), *The Inbetweeners 2* (2014) and *The Riot Club* (2014) – *Small Faces* (1996) following Lex MacLean (Iain Robertson) and his older brothers, Alan (Joe McFadden) and Bobby (Steven Duffy), in a manner akin to the aforementioned films depicting pairs of

⁴⁸ It is also worth noting that some films foreground a male and a female who may or may not be romantically involved – *My Brother Tom* (2001), *The Scouting Book for Boys* (2009) and *Wuthering Heights* (2011).

brothers. Similarly, aside from *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988), in which the central family portrayed has two daughters (Angela Walsh and Lorraine Ashbourne) and one son (Dean Williams)⁴⁹, there is an assortment of mixed gender but principally male ensemble casts, with the males outnumbering the females in *Trainspotting* (1996), *East is East* (1999), *Human Traffic* (1999), *Kidulthood* (2006), *Summer Scars* (2007) and *Hunky Dory* (2012) by, respectively, four to one, six to one, three to two, four to three, five to one, and seven to three⁵⁰.

As with the narratives about individuals and pairs, early, middle and late adolescence are illustrated: in *East is East* (1999), the protagonists fall into all three stages; in *Small Faces* (1996) Lex is thirteen years old, Bobby is eighteen years old, and Alan is perhaps a year younger; in *Summer Scars* (2007), the protagonists are thirteen and fourteen years old; in *Attack the Block* (2011), the protagonists look to be between fourteen and sixteen years of age; in *Kidulthood* (2006), most of the protagonists are fifteen years old; in *Hunky Dory* (2012), the protagonists are approaching the end of their compulsory schooling, meaning that they are probably sixteen; in *The History Boys* (2008) and *The Inbetweeners Movie* (2011), the protagonists have just completed their A-levels, making them eighteen; and in *That Sinking Feeling* (1979), *Trainspotting* (1996), *Twenty Four Seven* (1997), *Human Traffic* (1999), *Cemetery Junction* (2010), *Love Bite* (2012), *The Inbetweeners 2* (2014) and *The Riot Club* (2014), the protagonists are in their late adolescence. However, it is also noticeable that in *Trainspotting* (1996) and *Kidulthood* (2006), one of the protagonists is younger or older than the rest – respectively, fifteen-year-old Diane (Kelly Macdonald) and sixth-former Sam Peel (Noel Clarke) – and that this serves to broaden the films' respective commentaries upon the transition from childhood to adulthood. Furthermore, *Better Things* (2008) and *Pride* (2014) have ensemble casts with male and female protagonists of various ages – the former including David (Che Corr), Larry (Kurt Taylor) and Rob (Liam McIlfatrick), and the latter, Mark Ashton (Ben Schnetzer) and Mike Jackson (Joe Gilgun), all of whom are in their late adolescence. Moreover, some of the individuals within the ensemble casts are given more prominence than their peers – namely, Ronnie (Robert Buchanan) of *That Sinking Feeling* (1979), Lex of *Small Faces* (1996), Mark 'Rent Boy' Renton of *Trainspotting* (1996), Jip (John Simm) of *Human Traffic* (1999), Stuart Dakin (Dominic Cooper) and David Posner (Samuel Barnett) of *The History Boys* (2006), Freddie Taylor (Christian Cooke) of *Cemetery Junction* (2010), Moses (John Boyega) of *Attack the Block* (2011), Will McKenzie (Simon Bird) of *The Inbetweeners Movie* (2011) and *The Inbetweeners 2* (2014), Davey (Aneurin Barnard) of *Hunky Dory* (2012), Jamie (Ed Speleers) of *Love Bite* (2012), and Miles 'Milo' Richards

⁴⁹ In spite of the daughters, Powrie rather oddly asserts that *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988) is 'about a young boy's childhood in Liverpool' – specifically, Tony's:

'The film is arguably more family-centred than boy-centred. I have included it in the list [of boys' rite of passage films], however, because I feel that the struggle between father and son is more acutely dramatic than the relationship between fathers and daughters; it is not for nothing that the film closes with Tony's wedding' (2000: 317).

⁵⁰ By contrast, *Atonement* (2008) has two female protagonists and one male protagonist, and is, therefore, more suitably discussed in Chapter Four.

(Max Irons) and Alastair Ryle (Sam Claflin) of *The Riot Club* (2014) – and this is likely born of a desire to engender greater audience identification.

As indicated in Chapter Two, there is generic hybridity, and thematic, formal and stylistic diversity across the body of work at hand, with possible subcategories including: the biopic e.g. *Backbeat* (1994), *Control* (2007), *Nowhere Boy* (2009) and *Toast* (2010); the borstal/Young Offender Institution/prison film e.g. *Scum* (1979), *Made in Britain* (1983), *Borstal Boy* (2000) and *Starred Up* (2013); comedy, such as gross-out, parody and whimsy e.g. *That Sinking Feeling* (1979), *Kevin and Perry Go Large* (2000), *Popcorn* (2007), *Son of Rambow* (2007), *Anuvahood* (2011), *The Inbetweeners Movie* (2011) and *The Inbetweeners 2* (2014); comedy drama ('dramedy') e.g. *Gregory's Girl* (1981), *P'tang Yang Kipperbang* (1983), *East is East* (1999), *Purely Belter* (2000), *Sixty Six* (2006), *Starter for Ten* (2006), *The History Boys* (2006), *Somers Town* (2008), *Submarine* (2010), *Queen and Country* (2014) and *Just Jim* (2015); comedy horror e.g. *Love Bite* (2012); the crime thriller e.g. *The Fruit Machine* (1988) and *Young Soul Rebels* (1991); the dystopian film e.g. *Shopping* (1994) and *Shank* (2010); the fantasy film e.g. the Harry Potter franchise; the football hooligan film e.g. *Green Street* (2005), *Cass* (2008), *Awaydays* (2009) and *The Firm* (2009); heritage film e.g. *Another Country* (1984) and *Maurice* (1987); the hood film e.g. *Bullet Boy* (2004), *Kidulthood* (2006), *Adulthood* (2008), *Shank* (2009), *Shank* (2010), *Attack the Block* (2011) and *My Brother the Devil* (2012); films with minority ethnic protagonists e.g. *Babylon* (1980), *My Beautiful Launderette* (1985), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), *Wild West* (1992), *East is East* (1999), *Rage* (1999), *Wondrous Oblivion* (2001), *Bullet Boy* (2004), *Bradford Riots* (2006), *Kidulthood* (2006), *Sixty Six* (2006), *Adulthood* (2008), *Cass* (2008), *Somers Town* (2008), *Shank* (2009), *Shank* (2010), *Attack the Block* (2011), *Everywhere and Nowhere* (2011), *Wuthering Heights* (2011), *Gone Too Far* (2013) and *Sixteen* (2013) – which are considered in this chapter but examined more closely in Chapter Five; the queer film e.g. *My Beautiful Launderette* (1985), *Maurice* (1987), *Two of Us* (1987), *The Fruit Machine* (1988), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), *Beautiful Thing* (1996), *Get Real* (1999), *A.K.A.* (2002), *Shank* (2009), *My Brother the Devil* (2012) and *The Pass* (2016); the school film e.g. *Gregory's Girl* (1981), *Another Country* (1984), *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (2005), *The History Boys* (2006) and *Pride* (2014); films of a social realist bent e.g. *Quadrophenia* (1979), *Scum* (1979), *That Sinking Feeling* (1979), *Babylon* (1980), *Made in Britain* (1983), *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* (1988), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), *Wild West* (1992), *Shopping* (1994), *Beautiful Thing* (1996), *Small Faces* (1996), *Twenty Four Seven* (1997), *Twin Town* (1997), *A Room for Romeo Brass* (1999), *East is East* (1999), *Human Traffic* (1999), *Ratcatcher* (1999), *A.K.A.* (2002), *Billy Elliot* (2000), *Care* (2000), *Purely Belter* (2000), *There's Only One Jimmy Grimble* (2000), *Gabriel and Me* (2001), *Pure* (2002), *Sweet Sixteen* (2002), *Bullet Boy* (2004), *Kidulthood* (2006), *Starter for Ten* (2006), *This is England* (2006), *Control* (2007), *Summer Scars* (2007), *Adulthood* (2008), *Better Things* (2008), *Cass* (2008), *Somers Town* (2008), *The Firm* (2009), *Cemetery Junction* (2010), *Neds* (2010), *Shank* (2009), *Shank* (2010), *Soulboy* (2010), *Anuvahood* (2011), *Attack the Block* (2011), *My Brother the Devil* (2012), *Starred Up* (2013), *The Selfish Giant* (2013),

Kingsman: The Secret Service (2015) and *The Goob* (2015) – which are discussed later; the sports film e.g. *There's Only One Jimmy Grimble* (2000); the spy film e.g. *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2015); and the urban film, which overlaps with the football hooligan film, the hood film and films of a social realist bent e.g. *Quadrophenia* (1979), *Babylon* (1980), *Absolute Beginners* (1986), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), *Small Faces* (1996), *Trainspotting* (1996), *This is England* (2006), *Neds* (2010) and *Sixteen* (2013). However, as the remainder of this chapter details, definite lines of continuity cut across the heterogeneity. Firstly, there are notable patterns within the treatment of two particular aspects of adolescence: emerging sexuality, which, as outlined in Chapter Two, is a common theme in the coming-of-age genre, shown typically to play a part in the identity formation of protagonists; and educational endeavours and professional pursuits, which are sometimes positioned as the framework in which a protagonist's growth takes place. Secondly, an exploration of the palpable influence of British cinema's longstanding tradition of working-class or social realism on contemporary British coming-of-age films shows that there are three main types of trajectory for the protagonists, and that these are roughly equivalent to Franco Moretti's division of the European *Bildungsroman* (2000) into stories of successful or failed individualisation and socialisation (the 'classical' and 'late' modes), and those with more ambivalent outcomes (the 'new' or 'realistic' mode). Thirdly, whilst scholarship on some of the films in question draws attention to the prominent role of fathers and father-figures in the narratives, this chapter illustrates that the function of brothers – predominantly older brothers – is of equal significance. Obviously a number of other points of similarity are, for reasons of space, not dealt with here. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this chapter presents a worthwhile insight into some of the dominant characteristics of boy-centred coming-of-age films in contemporary British cinema.

Framing the Coming-of-Age Process: Emerging Sexuality, and Educational Endeavours and Professional Pursuits

(i) Emerging Sexuality

It is no surprise that a high proportion of boy-centred contemporary British coming-of-age films explore aspects of emerging sexuality, for as indicated in Chapters One and Two, portrayals of youth are bound to address these elements of adolescence. Naturally, some filmmakers choose to subvert expectations by downplaying such issues. For instance, in *Ratcatcher* (1999) and *Wondrous Oblivion* (2003), James and David are more interested in being simply friends with, respectively, Margaret Anne (Leanne Mullen) and Judy Samuel (Leonie Elliott), than anything else. In *Billy Elliot* (2000), *The Testimony of Taliesin Jones* (2000), *Son of Rambow* (2007) and *The Selfish Giant* (2013), Billy, Taliesin, Will and Lee, and Arbor and Swifty are too engrossed in, respectively, dancing, the question of whether God exists, filmmaking, and earning money through scrapping, to pay much attention to girls. In

Sweet Sixteen (2002), Liam's focus is providing a home for his mother, not reaching the age of consent. And in *Attack the Block* (2011) and *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2015), existential threats are paramount, with Moses et al and Eggsy defending, respectively, the people of South London from hostile aliens, and the human race from a mass cull. Nevertheless, the majority of contemporary British coming-of-age films with male protagonists feature facets of emerging sexuality, such as physical attraction, sexual desire, sexual experimentation, first love, romance and marriage. And as is to be expected when the ages of the protagonists are between ten and twenty-five, a gamut of experiences is illustrated – from the advent of puberty, to the act of masturbation; from a first kiss, to the loss of virginity; and from gaining a girlfriend or boyfriend, to losing a girlfriend or boyfriend.

More specifically, amongst the stories of early adolescence, much emphasis is put upon the anticipation and excitement of initial sexual encounters, and in this regard, three particular figures stand out: Alan of *P'tang Yang Kipperbang* (1982), who is fixated with kissing a girl called Ann Lawton (Abigail Cruttenden), but shyly refers to sex as 'the other thing' and finds himself paralysed with fear when given the opportunity to fulfil his wish whilst playing 'Antoine the philanderer' to Ann's Lady Daphne in a school production; the somewhat bolder Laurie of *Cider with Rosie* (1998), who, as a ten year old, plays exploratory games of Doctors and Nurses with Jo (Sally Beer), and as an intoxicated twelve year old, gains carnal knowledge of Rosie Burdock (Lia Barrow) under a hay wagon; and Shaun of *This is England* (2006), whose first kiss is played for laughs by pairing him with a much taller and definitely older girl, Michelle/'Smell' (Rosamund Hanson), and who lets a friend smell his fingers after his first fumbings with Smell in a garden shed. Significantly, too, although *The Long Day Closes* (1992) does not show any sexual activity, it is implied heavily that Bud comes to the realisation that he is homosexual, and worries that his desires are immoral: in an early scene, he gazes at a shirtless bricklayer, who winks at him, causing him to sink to the floor and look pensively at the camera; and in a later scene, his prayer for forgiveness at the altar of a Catholic church is interrupted by a vision of the bricklayer as Jesus on the cross, beginning with the image of a nail being hammered into one of the figure's hands, and ending when the figure lifts its head and shouts, 'Bud!'

By comparison, the experiences of those in their mid-adolescence may be said to fall into four main patterns. Firstly, a number of films take a light-hearted look at romantic and sexual endeavours, prodding gently at the adolescent propensity to obsess, and typically casting the female as, in some way, salvific. Gregory of *Gregory's Girl* (1981) and Danny (Jack Ryder) of *Popcorn* (2007) go to extraordinary lengths to try to secure girlfriends, enlisting the help of others to try to impress, respectively, Dorothy (Dee Hepburn) and Suki (Jodi Albert) – with humorous consequences. The eponymous heroes of *Kevin and Perry Go Large* (2000) may fantasise about becoming famous DJs, but their fawning behaviour around Candice (Laura Fraser) and Gemma (Tabitha Wady), and Kevin's bawdy daydreams about 'going all the way' with a girl reveal a much more mundane aim. Tomo and Marek of *Somers Town* (2008) are so entranced by French waitress Maria (Elisa Lasowski) that they transport

her home in a decorated wheelchair one day after work, get staggeringly drunk when they learn of her sudden departure, and then track her down in Paris one weekend. Oliver of *Submarine* (2010) is determined to lose his virginity before his sixteenth birthday and, much to the amusement of Jordana Bevan (Yasmin Paige), sets a somewhat elaborate and rather tacky scene for the big event. And in *The Inbetweeners Movie* (2011) and *The Inbetweeners 2* (2014), much of the action revolves around Will, Simon Cooper (Joe Thomas), Neil Sutherland (Blake Harrison) and Jay Cartwright's (James Buckley) awkward attempts at relationships with various females whose relative maturity acts as both a foil to the boys' japery and a catalyst for their self-improvement.

Secondly, several films offer a more serious exploration of affairs of the heart and, again, tend to imbue the female with redemptive qualities. In *Purely Belter* (2000), Sewell's unhappiness stemming from his parents' abandonment of him, challenging home life with his grandfather, and socio-economic disenfranchisement, is dispelled when he acquires a girlfriend, but returns when she aborts their child and leaves him for her former fiancé. In *Soulboy* (2010), the entry of Jo into the 1970s (specifically, 1974) Northern Soul scene is entangled with his attraction to Jane Rogers (Nichola Burley), from whom he first hears of club nights, and the evolution of his relationship with Mandy Hodgson (Felicity Jones), who teaches him how to dance and eventually becomes his girlfriend. In *Queen and Country* (2014), a contrast is set up between middle-class Bill's fascination with aristocratic University of Oxford student, Helen Montague/'Ophelia' (Tamsin Egerton), who turns out to have acute mental health issues, and his solid friendship and casual intimacy with working-class nurse, Sophie Adams (Aimee-Ffion Edwards). And in *The Goob* (2014), Goob finds himself on the receiving end of his abrasive step-father's wrath when he enters into a relationship with one of the migrant farmhands employed by the family, Eva (Marama Corlett), and although it is left unclear as to whether the couple meet up in the future, the closing image of him speeding away from the farm indicates that he decides to escape his troubled home life and follow her.

Thirdly, a distinct strand of films focuses in on the experiences of homosexual and bisexual protagonists, essentially framing coming of age as coming out. To begin with, *Borstal Boy* (2000) and *A.K.A* (2002), which are set, respectively, in 1941, and from 1978 to some time in the early 1980s, explore homosexuality and bisexuality against a backdrop of criminality. In the former, I.R.A. supporter Brendan Behan (the on-screen representative of the author of the 1958 autobiographical novel upon which the film is based) develops not only a relationship with the governor's daughter, but also an attraction to fellow offender, sailor Charlie Milwall (Danny Dyer), who is in borstal for committing the (then) crime of homosexuality. And in the latter, working-class Dean (the on-screen representative of Duncan Roy, the film's writer and director) leaves home because he is sexually abused by his

stepfather⁵¹, and then passes himself off as an aristocrat named Alexander Gryffoyn – even becoming romantically involved with a young gay aristocrat called David (George Asprey), and friends with David’s rentboy, Benjamin (Peter Youngblood Hills), before being apprehended and given, as the closing intertitle states, a ‘15-month sentence for Criminal Deception, relating to his spending £10,000 on his credit card during the year he passed as Alexander Gryffoyn.’ Moreover, four films revolve around pairs who are, in three cases, couples. Released in the late 1980s, *Two of Us* (1987) centres upon school leavers Matthew and Phil, who run away from home to the coast in the hope that they will be able to live together without disapproval, discrimination, abuse and the fear of attack. And similarly, *The Fruit Machine* (1988) follows Eddie and Michael as they, too, run away from home to the coast, leading them to a transvestite nightclub called ‘The Fruit Machine’, where they meet ‘Annabelle’ (Robbie Coltrane), whose brutal murder they witness, forcing them to go on the run – Michael extorting money from a gay opera singer after sleeping with him, and Eddie symbolically freeing a captive dolphin just before he dies. Indeed, these particular productions arguably constitute bold attempts on the part of, respectively, Granada Productions and the BBC Schools *Scene* series (1968-2002), to respond to ‘Thatcherite conservatism, with its institutionalised homophobia, AIDS hysteria and politically sanctioned discrimination (the notorious “Section 28”)’ (Griffiths 2006: 4), with the way in which Matthew and Phil are abandoned in the middle of nowhere by a taxi driver on the grounds that their relationship is ‘against the law’, and Matthew’s suggestion that he and Phil move abroad, where they would be ‘legal ... decent and proper ... of an age to consent’ speaking directly to the fact that, at that time, the age of consent for homosexual acts was twenty-one (even if the BBC did compromise by broadcasting the film at night, rather than in its usual school day slot). Comparatively, *Beautiful Thing* (1996) and *Get Real* (1999) – set, respectively, upon a South London council estate, and in and around a middle-class school in suburban Basingstoke – chart the will-they-won’t-they? relationships of, on the one hand, Jamie and Ste, and on the other hand, Steven and John, as they negotiate the challenge of living in communities in which homophobia and a general lack of openness about homosexuality compels them to hide their sexual orientation until, crucially, three of them can bear the secrecy no longer – Jamie and Ste choosing to declare their feelings publicly by dancing together in a communal area on the council estate, and Steven revealing the truth in a school assembly. Furthermore, in the same way that *Two of Us* (1987) and *The Fruit Machine* (1988) acquire a certain resonance when viewed in the context of wider socio-political developments pertaining to LGBTI rights, it is important to note that *Beautiful Thing* (1996) and *Get Real* (1999) make three of the four protagonists sixteen years old at a time

⁵¹ It is worth noting that the only contemporary British coming-of-age film devoted to exploring the sexual abuse of an adolescent male is *Care* (2000), in which Davey (Daniel Parker/Steven Mackintosh) is sexually abused whilst in a children’s home, and then, as an adult, disbelieved in court, causing him to commit suicide.

when the age of consent for homosexual acts had only just been lowered from twenty-one to eighteen⁵².

Fourthly, two films stand out for their depictions of incest, which frame their protagonists' burgeoning sexuality as morally problematic. In *The Cement Garden* (1993), Jack is, at first, presented as a fifteen year old who, rather predictably, masturbates frequently. However, somewhat unusually, he lusts after his seventeen-year-old sister, Julie (Charlotte Gainsbourg), and when, not long after the death of their father and Jack's sixteenth birthday, their mother dies, events take an especially sinister turn – the two siblings not only choosing to bury their mother in a makeshift cement sarcophagus and take on the care of their younger brother and sister in a bid to avoid being taken into foster care, but also eventually becoming lovers. Similarly, in *The War Zone* (1999), when fifteen-year-old Tom discovers that his father and eighteen-year-old sister, Jessie (Lara Belmont), are in an incestuous relationship, he confronts her about the matter, prompting her to burn one of her nipples with a lighter and then compel him to repeat the act. Yet with the revelation that their father has raped their baby sister, Tom and Jessie not only challenge him together, with Tom stabbing him, but appear to enter into their own incestuous relationship in a final ominous scene.

For those in their upper adolescence, aside from Billy of *Shopping* (1994), who rejects Jo's (Sadie Frost) advances on the grounds that sex is unsafe in the 1990s, the kind of infatuation displayed in the stories of mid-adolescence is also evident here and, even more commonly, a relationship or, in some cases, the pursuit of a relationship is portrayed as intrinsic to personal growth. Firstly, the adaptation of two *Bildungsromane* by Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby* (2002) and *Great Expectations* (2013), are nineteenth-century tales of young men whose endeavours to secure a steady income are inextricably intertwined with their relationships with, respectively, Madeline Bray (Anne Hathway), whom Nicholas comes to marry, and Estella (Holliday Grainger), whom Pip loves, but who seems to be incapable of loving anyone. Secondly, there is a trio of what may be termed university films, in which the challenges of forming and maintaining a relationship with a girlfriend constitute a significant part of the drama: *The Rachel Papers* (1989) focuses upon University of Oxford student-to-be and then actual student Charles, whose pursuit of, subsequent disillusionment with, and then nostalgia for an American girl called Rachel Noyce (Ione Skye) is, as the title indicates, the driving force of the narrative; *Starter for Ten* (2006) follows working-class University of Bristol student Brian Jackson (James McAvoy) in

⁵² *Toast* (2010) is also worth mentioning because although it does not foreground Nigel's sexuality until the denouement, it is important to recognise that the narrative hints at a causal connection between his first kiss with a boy and his decision to leave home to pursue a career involving cooking. Specifically, his first kiss with Stuart (Ben Aldridge), the son of the owner of the pub in which he gets his first kitchen job, and Stuart's advice to him to pursue his dreams, is followed by the film's conclusion, in which Nigel returns home to find that his father has died, prompting him to leave and try to get a job in the kitchen at The Savoy. Thus Stuart's advice to Nigel – 'You have every choice in the world. You've just got to be brave. You can be anything that you want to be' – is framed as life-changing.

his misguided attempts to impress glamorous *University Challenge* team-mate Alice Harbinson (Alice Eve), and his developing romance with middle-class, politically-conscious Rebecca Epstein (Rebecca Hall); and although it is more university graduate Art's lack of direction and complicated relationship with his parents, than his troubled relationship with Jessica (Alisa Arnah), that comes to the fore in *How to Be* (2008), the latter is clearly key to the portrait of a hapless young man. Thirdly, just as *Backbeat* (1994), set between 1960 and 1962, concentrates on not only Sutcliffe's friendship and working relationship with Lennon, but also his romantic relationship with photographer and artist Astrid Kirchherr (Sheryl Lee), so *Control* (2007), set between 1973 and 1980, depicts not only Curtis's maturation as a musician, but also his relationship with Debbie Woodruff (Samantha Morton), who became his girlfriend and then wife, and his relationship with Annik Honoré (Alexandra Maria Lara), a journalist and music promoter who (according to the film) became his mistress. Fourthly, as with the films dealing in mid-adolescence, a notable strand explores the experiences of homosexual and bisexual protagonists – on the one hand, the much-discussed *My Beautiful Launderette* (1985), *Maurice* (1987) and *Young Soul Rebels* (1999), and more recently, *Shank* (2009) and *My Brother the Devil* (2012). More specifically, *My Beautiful Launderette* (1985), *Maurice* (1987) and *Young Soul Rebels* (1999) centre upon, respectively: old school friends Omar and Johnny, who refurbish a launderette and end up using the back office to make love⁵³; Maurice Hall (James Wilby) and Clive Durham (Hugh Grant), who become sexually intimate whilst at the University of Cambridge, but are forced to conceal their relationship because homosexuality was illegal in early twentieth-century Britain, resulting in Clive's marriage and Maurice's elopement with Clive's under-gamekeeper, Alec Scudder (Rupert Graves); and soul music pirate and club DJs Caz and Chris, the former of whom enters into a relationship with a punk by the name of Billibud (Jason Durr). Similarly, *Shank* (2009) and *My Brother the Devil* (2012) combine modern-day urban gang life with closeted homosexuality or bisexuality: the former charting the relationship between gang member Cal and French student of English Olivier (Marc Laurent), contrasting the coarseness of Cal's gang, with Olivier's warmth and sensuality, and ending with Cal being raped by another male gang member in front of the gang and the couple leaving the city in search of a better life; and the latter showing gang member Rashid as he develops a relationship with ex-gang member turned professional photographer Sayyid (Saïd Taghmaoui), both betraying his girlfriend, Vanessa (Elarica Gallacher), and angering his younger brother, Mo, who reveals Rashid's secret to the gang, almost leading to Rashid's murder⁵⁴. Finally, there are motley tales of disappointment or fulfilment, with deception and death for some, and reparation and commitment for others. On one side: Jimmy of *Quadrophenia* (1979) is betrayed by Steph (Leslie Ash), who has sex with him, only to then start going out with one of his friends (Mark Wingett); Ricky of *Bullet Boy* (2004) is murdered before he gets the chance to fulfil his wish of settling down with Shea (Sharea Samuels); and Robbie of *Atonement* (2007) dies at war, preventing a reunion with Cecilia Tallis (Keira Knightley). On the other side: Thomas

⁵³ *My Beautiful Launderette* (1985) is discussed further in Chapter Five.

⁵⁴ *My Brother the Devil* (2012) is discussed further in Chapter Five.

Anthony/‘Tony’ of *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988) marries Rose (Toni Mallen)⁵⁵; Jip of *Human Traffic* (1999) manages to overcome his sexual performance anxiety, sleeping with long-term friend Lulu (Lorraine Pilkington) and looking set to become her boyfriend; in *Adulthood* (2008), ex-con Sam begins to undergo a kind of redemption when he develops a relationship with Lexi (Scarlett Alice Johnson); and in *Cemetery Junction* (2010), whilst Freddie Taylor (Christian Cooke) ends up with childhood sweetheart Julie (Felicity Jones), so Paul/‘Snork’ forms a relationship with café worker Louise (Bryony Hannah), who, it is revealed, has long had feelings for him.

It can be seen, then, that boy-centred contemporary British coming-of-age films typically characterise the experience of puberty, and feelings about and relationships with girls and boys, as integral to adolescent identity formation. Indeed, as indicated by their titles, *Gregory’s Girl* (1981) and *The Rachel Papers* (1989) revolve around these aspects of adolescence, and in *Beautiful Thing* (1996), *Get Real* (1999), *Human Traffic* (1999), *Starter for Ten* (2006), *Atonement* (2007), *Cemetery Junction* (2010), *Soulboy* (2010), *Submarine* (2010), *The Inbetweeners Movie* (2011) and *The Inbetweeners 2* (2015), a will-they-won’t-they? dynamic not only comes to the fore, but threatens to subsume all of the other narrative threads and is, with the exception of *The Inbetweeners 2* (2015), resolved with a romantic act or gesture in the final scene.

(ii) Educational Endeavours and Professional Pursuits

Alongside the treatment of emerging sexuality, a notable storyline is one involving its protagonist’s or protagonists’ formal education and/or entry into a certain vocation or career. There are: four biopics – *Backbeat* (1994), *Control* (2007), *Nowhere Boy* (2009) and *Toast* (2010); four fictional stories about individuals – *Buddy’s Song* (1991), *Billy Elliot* (2000), the Harry Potter series (2001-2011) and *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2015); and two fictional dramas with ensemble casts, *The History Boys* (2006) and *Hunky Dory* (2012). Specifically, *The History Boys* (2006) and *Hunky Dory* (2012), which are both set in secondary schools, conclude by informing the audience as to what the protagonists go on to do in later life – the former using an imaginary conversation between teacher Mrs Dorothy Lintott (Frances de la Tour) and her former pupils, and the latter combining slow-motion cine film-style footage of the protagonists, with typed words outlining their future paths. And rather differently, the biopics and other fictions centre upon their protagonists’ growth into particular vocations or careers, examining the conditions and forces that, variously, enable

⁵⁵ Admittedly, Tony’s feelings about his marriage are open to interpretation, with scenes of the ceremony and scenes of the party in the living room at home interrupted by a scene in which he stands alone at the threshold to his wife’s family home and cries. However, there are clues that this display of emotion is bound up with leaving home and missing his dead father, as opposed to regrets about his marriage. His mother is heard singing in the background, and his position by the threshold holds an obvious symbolism in light of the fact that marriage is commonly regarded as a rite of passage. Moreover, although his relationship with his often abusive and tyrannical father is shown to have been volatile, the moment when he lingers by a photograph of him, just before his wedding ceremony, suggests that he is acutely aware of his father’s absence on the occasion of his marriage.

and disable them, as well as showcasing their talent, zeal, diligence and resilience. For example, *Toast* (2010) shows how food writer, journalist and broadcaster Nigel Slater's teenage years were pivotal in terms of his interest in cookery, spurred on, in part, by a sense of competition with his much loathed stepmother. And *Backbeat* (1994), *Control* (2007) and *Nowhere Boy* (2009) portray musicians who were in highly successful British bands but died relatively early on in life: Sutcliffe of The Beatles, from a brain aneurysm at the age of twenty-one; Curtis of Joy Division, of suicide at the age of twenty-three; and Lennon of The Beatles, from gunshot wounds when he was assassinated at the age of forty. Indeed, it is worth noting that two of the four biopics concern the early days of The Beatles.

Furthermore, death holds a different significance for the fictional protagonists of *Billy Elliot* (2000), the Harry Potter series (2001-2011) and *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2015) – respectively, a twelve year old whose passion for ballet is initially opposed by his miner father and brother but who ends up playing the part of the Swan in Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake*, an eleven year old who discovers that he is a wizard and comes to defeat the evil Lord Voldemort (Richard Bremner and Ralph Fiennes), and an unemployed nineteen year old who turns into an agent for an international intelligence agency and helps to save the human race. For these protagonists, it is the death of their parents which is of consequence. Although Billy's mother has passed away, there are several indications that she would have encouraged her son's love of dance, and still inspires him. Harry's parents, it transpires, were killed by Lord Voldemort as they were trying to protect Harry, providing Harry with a personal reason to hate Voldemort. And it is the revelation that his deceased biological father was a Kingsman agent that motivates Eggsy to embark upon the training needed to follow suit.

Further to this, there is an important line to be drawn between two subcategories of the European *Bildungsroman*, as discussed in Chapter One, and a number of the films at hand. Firstly, three of the biopics are tantamount to *Künstlerromane* in the way that they chart the development of artists, specifically, musicians in world-renowned British bands. And although *Buddy's Song* (1991) is fictional, it follows similar lines by showing Buddy as he gradually becomes a success with his band The Hurt/The Wild Ones – playing popular gigs, releasing a single, and being signed by a record company. Secondly, the fictions are comparable with *Erziehungsromane*, where institutions of education facilitate advancement into a vocation or career – the Royal Ballet School, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and Kingsman (an independent international intelligence agency founded in 1919 by wealthy British individuals who had lost their heirs in the First World War) helping, respectively, Billy, Harry and Eggsy to master various arts and skills.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ A less prominent but nevertheless notable theme is faith and religion. As discussed in Chapter Five, the protagonists of *East is East* (1999) are brought up by a Pakistani Muslim father and a British Roman Catholic mother, and the protagonists of *Wondrous Oblivion* (2001) and *Sixty Six* (2006) are situated within Jewish families. Furthermore, three other films explore how embracing, rejecting, or learning more about faith or a religion constitutes a decisive factor in a protagonist's identity formation. *The Testimony of Taliesin Jones*

The Influence of Social or Working-Class Realism

(i) The Basics: What, How and Why?

If there is any one mode of filmmaking that appears to have had a major influence upon boy-centred contemporary British coming-of-age films, it is realism or, more accurately, British cinema's longstanding tradition of social or working-class realism and, crucially, the various developments within that tradition. Some may prefer to think of social realism not as an 'influence' or 'tradition' but, rather, a concept established by film critics, reviewers and scholars in order to make sense of patterns that they have observed. Either way, there is an undeniable connection between the films and the mode in question, and to examine their relationship illuminates both.

To begin with, in terms of 'what may loosely be described as content, or subject matter' (Hill 2000b: 250), 'British social realist texts have ... largely concerned themselves with the portrayal of the working class' (Lay 2002: 18) and, therefore, it is arguable that the tradition of social realism is palpable in all of the films with working-class male protagonists. Indeed, although Hill notes that 'what is striking about British "realism" of the 1980s is just how little concern there is with the traditional working class' – contextualising his statement with reference to the massive decline of the manufacturing sector, 'including the heavy industries traditionally associated with the traditional working class' (1999: 135) – Lay highlights a congruity, in the same period, between filmmakers 'working in the social realist mode' (2002: 83) and 'a centring on youth unemployment' (2002: 84), which was one of the effects of the degeneration of the manufacturing sector. Furthermore, Lay goes on to suggest that the following decade saw a tangible turn towards explorations of the lives of socio-economically disadvantaged young people more generally:

With a sharper focus on family life and the struggles of individuals caught in cycles of poverty and abuse in the 1990s has come a new representational emphasis that is not without precedent in British

(2000) follows a boy who discovers that his piano teacher dabbles in faith healing, causing him to ponder the existence of God and conclude that he believes, despite his father's vague agnosticism and his brother's strident atheism. *Gabriel and Me* (2001) focuses upon Jimmy, whose aspiration to become an angel is articulated as a noble mission to 'save people' ('from themselves; from each other; from the intolerable burden society puts upon their shoulders, with its pernicious institutions which lure them into a false sense of hope and security'), but who is ridiculed by his unemployed and terminally-ill father, who thinks that 'God's a right bastard', not realising that Jimmy's behaviour is probably a projection of his desire to see his father recover. And *Son of Rambow* (2007) sets Will's Exclusive Brethren background, particularly the fact that he is not allowed to watch films or television, against his friendship with rebellious Lee, with whom he makes a film based on *First Blood* (1982) – the result, not only a finished film, but also Will's mother, upon discovering her son's secret, choosing to leave the Brethren in order to give him a freer upbringing. Ergo, faith or religion is shown to either constrict or inspire protagonists and, importantly, there is a distinction to be made between the narratives in which the family is drawn as a source of religious oppression, and those in which an individual finds faith or religion not only regardless of, but actually in spite of their family.

social realist cinema. Many films and television dramas seem to have shifted their attention to the children of the working class' (2002: 108).

Moreover, this pattern appears to have continued into the 2000s and 2010s (thus far), with, it seems, more films than ever depicting young people in a working-class milieu. Hence within the catalogue of contemporary British coming-of-age films with male protagonists, those that may be said to be linked to social realism because of their protagonists' working-class background are *Quadrophenia* (1979), *Scum* (1979), *That Sinking Feeling* (1979), *Babylon* (1980), *Made in Britain* (1983), *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), *Wild West* (1992), *Shopping* (1994), *Beautiful Thing* (1996), *Small Faces* (1996), *Twenty Four Seven* (1997), *Twin Town* (1997), *A Room for Romeo Brass* (1999), *East is East* (1999), *Human Traffic* (1999), *Rage* (1999), *Ratcatcher* (1999), *Billy Elliot* (2000), *Care* (2000), *Purely Belter* (2000), *There's Only One Jimmy Grimble* (2000), *Gabriel and Me* (2001), *A.K.A.* (2002), *Pure* (2002), *Sweet Sixteen* (2002), *Bullet Boy* (2004), *Kidulthood* (2006), *Starter for Ten* (2006), *This is England* (2006), *Control* (2007), *Summer Scars* (2007), *Adulthood* (2008), *Better Things* (2008), *Cass* (2008), *Somers Town* (2008), *The Firm* (2009), *Cemetery Junction* (2010), *Neds* (2010), *Shank* (2009), *Shank* (2010), *Soulboy* (2010), *Anuvahood* (2011), *Attack the Block* (2011), *My Brother the Devil* (2012), *Starred Up* (2013), *The Selfish Giant* (2013), *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2015) and *The Goob* (2015).

Crucially, there is formal and stylistic diversity in the body of work at hand. For example, on a general level, Hill discerns in British cinema of the 1980s 'a growing tendency ... towards a mixing of realist devices with those of other aesthetic traditions such as the avant-garde, European "art cinema", the thriller, the "woman's film", and, in many cases, comedy' (1999: 136). And in response to an article by journalist Vanessa Thorpe, in which she aligns films of the so-called British New Wave with examples of realism in the 1990s, he points out that whilst 'she is right to suggest lines of continuity between the realism of the 1960s and subsequent film-making, she is also too eager to identify this as a relatively unbroken tradition and to run together differing forms of film-making practice' (2000b: 249). Likewise, Leggott's consideration of 'a realist impulse that continues to manifest itself through subject matter or form, or a combination of the two' both acknowledges 'the reworking of popular genres through realist strategies, and the energising of social realist films through the adoption of generic traits' (2008: 56), and warns against the dangers of 'lazily lump[ing] together' directors whose work 'reveals the multiplicity, rather than uniformity, of realist strategies available to the contemporary filmmaker' (2008: 72). And analogously, Lay asserts that 'to speak of style in contemporary British social realism is to speak rather of a plurality of stylistic approaches ranging from the naturalistic, observational style of Ken Loach, to the poetic, even hypnotic style of relative newcomers like Ramsay and Pawlikowski' (2002: 100). Indeed, Annette Kuhn goes so far as to contest a valid link between *Ratcatcher* (1999) and social realism:

'*Ratcatcher*'s characters and setting – a working-class family living in a Glasgow slum tenement – might suggest that the film belongs to the tradition of social realism that is widely regarded as a

distinguishing mark of British cinema But the comparison does not stand up even to minimal scrutiny, because the ... realism of the film's settings is constantly brought up against its poetic elements. ... Scenes of children playing in the street recall the documentary realism of film-makers and photographers like Denis Mitchell, Bert Hardy and Oscar Marzaroli. The shabby inner-urban and industrial landscapes, the desultory comings and goings of adolescent boys, a working-class household with mother at the centre, an edgy father-son relationship – all recall the social realism of Free Cinema and the British New Wave. There are elements of the social problem film, too, in allusions to the historical actualities of a dustmen's strike and housing problems in Glasgow. However, none of these realities – documentary, drama of working-class life, social history, referencing as they do an outer, social, world – dominates the film, either separately or collectively. Rather, they are set against, and qualified by, "realities" that are best described as inner, imaginal, even fantastic' (2008: 17).

Further to this, Clair Schwarz's interrogation of Meadows's *oeuvre* demonstrates how 'readings of Meadows' work are marked by a tendency to overemphasise the social realist aspects of the work, twinned with an under appreciation [sic] of the generic elements which inform the films' (2013: 19), detailing, for instance, how various scholars have attempted to situate his practice as somewhere between social realism and art cinema (Forrest 2009 and Seino 2010), or as 'emotional realism' (Brown 2007) or 'grotesque realism' (Fradley 2013: 51), before then applying her own label of 'liminal realism'. Similarly, echoing Christopher Williams's formulation of British 'social art cinema' (1996), which denotes the synthesis of 'the traditional social concerns of British cinema with the more individualistic and artistically self-conscious interests of European art cinema' (Hill 2000b: 258-259), David Forrest refers to the work of Andrea Arnold, Joanna Hogg, Duane Hopkins, Meadows, Samantha Morton, Pawel Pawlikowski and Lynne Ramsey when advancing the concept of 'new British realism', which he describes as 'a poetic and aesthetically bold approach to ... subject matter, which merges traditional thematic concerns with expressive art cinema templates' (2010: 32) or, more precisely, puts 'emphasis on the poetic potential of the everyday, in the process rejecting direct engagements with social issues and instead deploying a more aesthetically rooted engagement with space and place' (2013: 38). Thus, amongst the films in the frame there is: the 'naturalistic, observational style' (Lay 2002: 100) of *Scum* (1979), *That Sinking Feeling* (1979), *Made in Britain* (1983) and *Sweet Sixteen* (2002); the 'poetic ... style' (Lay 2002: 100) and episodic narrative structures of *Ratcatcher* (1999), *Better Things* (2008) and *The Goob* (2015); the blend of the everyday and the fantastical in *Ratcatcher* (1999), *There's Only One Jimmy Grimble* (2000), *Gabriel and Me* (2001), *Neds* (2010) and *Attack the Block* (2011); the foregrounded artifice, painterly tableaux, songs performed-to-camera, and non-linear narrative structure of *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* (1988); the formally and stylistically playful and self-conscious *Trainspotting* (1996) and *Human Traffic* (1999); the 'picturesque black and white' (Dave 2013: 763) and relatively static camera of *Control* (2007); the mixture of hand-held camerawork, wide-angle shots, and tracking shots in *Starred Up* (2013); the MTV-style editing and special effects of *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2015); the recreation of historic music gigs and recordings in *Backbeat* (1994) and *Control* (2007); the period detail and epic scale of *Atonement* (2007); the exuberant dance performances and

soundtracks of *Billy Elliot* (2000) and *Soulboy* (2010); the urban thriller elements of *Shopping* (1994), *Bullet Boy* (2004), *Kidulthood* (2006), *Adulthood* (2008), *Shank* (2009), *Shank* (2010), *Anuvahood* (2011), *Attack the Block* (2011) and *My Brother the Devil* (2012); the music video-style characteristics of *Human Traffic* (1999), *Kidulthood* (2006), *Adulthood* (2008) and *Shank* (2010); and, as cited above, the much-debated formal and stylistic traits of Meadows's *Twenty Four Seven* (1997), *A Room for Romeo Brass* (1999), *This is England* (2006) and *Somers Town* (2008). Furthermore, it is important to not only consider the differing forms and styles of the films in question, but also interrogate the relationship between content and form, subject matter and style. What, for example, is the effect of the set dance pieces on the socio-political content of *Billy Elliot* (2000) and vice versa (Hill 2004, Leggott 2004 and Alderson 2011)? Does the appearance of the Archangel Gabriel in human form (Billy Connolly) jar with or complement the naturalism⁵⁷ that otherwise characterises *Gabriel and Me* (2001)? How do the music video-style features of *Kidulthood* (2006) colour the portrayal of working-class adolescent males in West London? And so on.

In addition, as Hallam and Marshment state, social realism is 'a discursive term used ... to describe films that aim to show the effects of environmental factors on the development of character through depictions that emphasise the relationship between location and identity', and is '[t]raditionally associated in Britain with a reformist or occasionally revolutionary politics that deem[s] [that] adverse social circumstances [can] be changed by the introduction of more enlightened social policies or structural change in society' (2000: 184). As Lay encapsulates: 'There are structural reasons for inequalities in society, which social realism posits can be seen in the effect of place on character' (2002: 19). Accordingly, a number of contemporary British coming-of-age films with working-class male protagonists set out to expose the disadvantageous conditions of the working-class, particularly in terms of the spaces and places that they are shown to inhabit. And more generally, the crossing of a coming-of-age narrative with social realism is a, at least potentially, compelling combination, with the meeting of a form that is concerned with issues of 'self-determination and ... socialization' (Moretti 2000: 15), and a mode that accentuates structural inequities that inhibit successful self-actualisation and integration into society, making for a powerful intersection of interests.

(ii) From Fairy Tales to Tragedies: *Billy Elliot* (2000) and *Sweet Sixteen* (2002)

Relatively few contemporary British coming-of-age films with working-class male protagonists have attracted scholarly scrutiny. In dissecting aspects of realism in British cinema, Hill (2000b, 2004 and 2009a), Leggott (2004 and 2008) and Dave (2006, 2011 and 2013) consider *Ratcatcher* (Leggott 2004), *Twenty Four Seven* (Leggott 2004 and Dave 2006), *Billy Elliot* (Hill 2004, Leggott 2004 and Dave 2006), *Gabriel and Me* (Leggott 2004), *Sweet Sixteen* (Hill 2009a and 2011) and *This is England* (Dave 2011 and 2013). Although Petrie and

⁵⁷ 'Naturalism', here, denotes the philosophical belief that everything arises from natural properties and causes, with supernatural or spiritual explanations excluded or discounted.

Murray are more focused upon the nature of Scottish cinema than the place of realism in British cinema – matters which Hill combines in his discussions of *Sweet Sixteen* (2009a and 2011) – their examinations of *Ratcatcher* (Petrie 2000 and 2004, and Murray 2015), *Sweet Sixteen* (Petrie 2004) and *Neds* (Murray 2015) are helpful. And Leggott's claim that 'it is the Midlands-born Shane Meadows who is arguably the most influential realist British filmmaker of the era' (Leggott 2008: 74) has been vindicated by the emergence of both a special Meadows-based edition of the *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (10:4 2013) and an edited collection entitled *Shane Meadows: Critical Essays* (2013), which, between them, contain analyses of *Twenty Four Seven* (FitzGerald and Godfrey 2013, Forrest 2013, Fradley and Kingston 2013, Godfrey 2013, Petrovic 2013 and Steans 2013), *A Room for Romeo Brass* (Fradley and Kingston 2013), *This is England* (Fitzgerald and Godfrey 2013, Forrest 2013, Fradley 2013, Fradley and Kingston 2013, Lebeau 2013, Petrovic 2013, Snelson and Sutton 2013, and Steans 2013) and *Somers Town* (FitzGerald and Godfrey 2013, Forrest 2013, Fradley 2013, Petrovic 2013 and Rydzewska 2013). However, this amounts to coverage of only about a fifth of the titles at hand, meaning that there is still much more to be explored.

Of all of the films in question, *Billy Elliot* (2000) deserves to be highlighted for its significant impact upon audiences and scholars alike. Not only was it a box office success, and not only has it received several awards and been turned into an internationally popular stage musical; it has also been the subject of much scholarly debate. For instance, Hill asserts that the coal dispute of 1984-1985 is cast as 'a major obstacle to the achievement of [Billy's] ambitions' (2004: 107), emphasises the film's 'questioning of the heterosexual masculinity that underpins the working-class community' (2004: 104), and concludes that 'in a loose allegory of the transition from a manufacturing to a service-based economy, Billy becomes an emblem of economic rejuvenation through participation in the "creative industries"' (2004: 108). And in a similar vein, Dave claims that the film may be aligned with 'Blairism ... in its representation of the glittering trajectory of individual talent and success as an adequate answer to structural social problems' (2006: 75), whilst Alderson opines that the drama 'presents the transition to neoliberalism as one from a repressive and repressed "masculine" past to a more tolerant, expressive, cosmopolitan, and "feminine" present' (2011: 2). Further to this, Leggott situates the film within a discernible tendency of late 1990s and early 2000s British cinema to 'explor[e] ... the anxieties that accompany the diminishment of homosocial authority, tradition and territory' (2004: 163), arguing that Billy is one of two young male protagonists in British cinema of who are "'angelic" in the sense of being driven by a restorative impulse', 'casting their protective eye over endangered homosocial space' and 'giving warning that new models and strategies are necessary for successive male generations' (2004: 168). However, he also posits that 'these boy-centred films tend to be sanguine about the capability of the angelic child to revive either weakened fathers, or the spaces of homosocial tradition with which they are associated' (Leggott 2004: 168), and develops his analogy by reading the film's final image as denotative of 'Billy's

dreams of flight from his father, and the homosocial lineage he personifies', with his 'final positioning upon the indeterminate, non-gendered realm of the theatre stage signal[ing] the end of his quest for a fluid, transgressive arena beyond the restrictive landscape of his home town' (Leggott 2004: 171).

By contrast, *Sweet Sixteen* (2002) is a film whose protagonist's downfall provides a useful contrast to *Billy Elliot* (2000) – the plot and style typifying Loachian social realism or, as Knight prefers to call it, naturalism, after the literary movement that began with Émile Zola in the nineteenth century:

'Naturalist films do not fix characters' problems or resolve their conflicts. Nor do they reconcile the vague and romantic aspirations of these characters with the hard facts about their own situations which make these aspirations unrealisable. On the contrary, naturalist films offer a perspective from which to understand the social mechanisms that perpetuate just these very sorts of irreconcilable conflicts between what characters desire and what they can achieve' (1997: 77).

'[E]xamining the impact of the decline of manufacturing on Scotland's disenfranchised working classes in the latter decades of the twentieth century' (Martin-Jones 2009: 180), the narrative pivots on Liam's 'relentless downward spiral' (Hill 2011: 187), exposing the socio-economic and familial conditions that lead him to: truant school for several months; sell black market cigarettes and illegal drugs in order to buy his mother a caravan and then flat to live in after her prison term; lose his best friend (William Ruane); almost lose the support of his sister; and, 'with the lack of any viable escape route' (Hill 2011: 188) after he stabs his mother's boyfriend (Gary McCormack), commit suicide, or so it is suggested. As Hill observes, it is one of Loach's 'bleakest films' (2011: 188).

According to Hill, the story is marked by three main features. Firstly, unlike fellow British/Scottish contemporary coming-of-age film *Trainspotting* (1996), which 'invokes the rhetoric of bohemianism and its rejection of social conformity and materialism, the implication of [*Sweet Sixteen* (2002)] ... is that the majority of these acquisitions do not lie within the grasp of its working-class characters in the first place' (Hill 2011: 186). Secondly, whereas *Trainspotting* (1996) sees 'the proceeds from a drug deal ... offer[] the possibility of individual "escape"', *Sweet Sixteen* (2002) positions drug dealing as 'a false avenue of "escape"', with 'the main characters end[ing] up in worse circumstances than those in which they began' (Hill 2011: 186). And thirdly, [t]he sense of gloom that pervades ... *Sweet Sixteen* ... is made all the greater by virtue of the absence of any character, or characters, who might offer a more developed, or politicised, perspective on events' (Hill 2011: 186). Indeed, as screenwriter Paul Laverty reveals, in a DVD extra about the making of the film, one of his aims was to show the lives of disenfranchised working-class youth like Liam, who are somewhat at the mercy of social forces beyond their control:

'I know a lot about the history of shipbuilding and what it meant to the west of Scotland and what it particularly meant to Greenock and Port Glasgow, and so, about thirty or forty years ago, you know, young people like Liam would have had an apprenticeship. They'd have got skilled jobs. They'd have had a daily routine. They'd have met their peers and they'd have ran a life that made sense. They'd

have got paid at the end of the week and they actually had a way of planning and thinking about their future' (Icon Film DVD extra 'Sweet Success').

Importantly, too, an episodic plot structure, the denial of an unambiguous and optimistic denouement, the use of non-professional actors and actresses (who are encouraged to improvise), location shooting, and 'naturalistic, observational' (Lay 2002: 100) camerawork aligns it with other works of Loach. And, in fact, it may be fruitful to think of *Sweet Sixteen* (2002) as a descendant of another Loach film which is perhaps not only British cinema's best-known coming-of-age film, but also exemplary of social realism, *Kes* (1969) – the story of fifteen-year-old Billy Casper (David Bradley), whose 'success at training a kestrel is achieved against the odds of a repressive and unenlightened school background' (Street 1997: 89), and then thwarted when his older brother Jud (Freddie Fletcher) kills the bird as revenge for Billy failing to place a winning bet for him. Indeed, when asked at a Q&A organised by Camden and Islington Left Unity (12th March 2015) if he saw any relationship between the two films at hand, Loach replied that whereas Billy is destined for a job as a miner, but is wholly unsuited to that form of employment, there is, because of neoliberalism's failings, no available employment for school-leaver Liam, or at least none that is legal⁵⁸.

The contrast between *Billy Elliot* (2000) and *Sweet Sixteen* (2002) is, then, stark: on one side, Billy's good fortune in the form of a supportive ballet teacher, best friend and – eventually – father, brother, community, ballet school and respected choreographer; on the other side, Liam's hard luck when it comes to trying to make money and do right by his mother and sister, but ending up involved with criminals. Thus, taken as a pair, they usefully demonstrate just how wide the spectrum of the working-class adolescent male experience is within contemporary British coming-of-age films. Just as Hill claims that 'Representations of the Working Class in British Cinema of the 1990s' may be divided into two main strands, 'Failure and Utopianism' (2004: 179), so it may be said that *Billy Elliot* (2000) and *Sweet Sixteen* (2002) exemplify these opposing tendencies. Moreover, it is crucial to note the allegorical weight that Hill et al accord the stories of Billy and Liam, discussing them as vehicles for socio-political issues of their respective days and, thereby, echoing Moretti's idea that, in the European *Bildungsroman*, '[y]outh acts as a sort of *symbolic concentrate* of the uncertainties and tensions of an entire cultural system, and the hero's growth becomes the narrative convention or *fictio* that permits the exploration of conflicting values' (2000: 185). Furthermore, Billy and Liam may be said to embody Bakhtin's notion that, in the *Bildungsroman*, the protagonist is one who is 'on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to another', the 'transition ... accomplished in him and through him' (2006: 23).

However, as illuminating as it is to situate Billy and Liam within debates about the decline of heavy industry, the advance of neoliberalism, and changing models of

⁵⁸ It was I who asked the question.

masculinity, it is arguable that these angles sideline an essential ingredient – the critical part that personality traits are shown to play in the boys' respective trajectories. That is, although Hill (2004), Leggott (2004), Dave (2006) and Alderson (2011) make much of the differences between Billy and his father and brother in terms of their attitudes towards the miners' strike and issues of gender, scant attention is given to the way in which the three male characters are united by a streak of determination and, at times, intransigence – and how this battle of wills contributes enormously to the drama, with Billy's passion and perseverance matched by the force of his father and brother's disapproval, in turn, exhorting Billy to greater efforts. For example, knowing that his father and brother would pour scorn if they caught him dancing, Billy practises the first arabesque and the pirouette in the privacy of the family bathroom and, when his brother is out, the bedroom shared by the siblings. And whilst incongruity is underscored by the intercutting of shots of Billy and his classmates being taught the *balancé*, with shots of Jacky Elliot, Tony Elliot and other striking miners being restrained by police (the similarity between the group formation of the children and the group formation of the miners turning them into two opposing tribes, particularly when the footage of the striking miners and the music from the ballet class are combined), the sequence also accentuates a shared tenacity across the three generations of Elliot males, especially when the image of Jacky, amidst the fray, is accompanied by ballet teacher Sandra Wilkinson's (Julie Walters) instructions to Billy to move in a way that is 'Open! Powerful! Proud!' Further to this, when a quarrel between Jacky, Tony and Sandra provokes Billy into 'bursting out of the door of his house, pushing on walls, kicking the ground, and beating his head with his hands' (Leggott 2004: 171), the choreography and 'accompaniment of The Jam's edgy, post-punk anthem "A Town Called Malice"' (Hill 2004: 105) frames Billy's response to his father and brother's hostility towards his teacher as a rebellious and cathartic dance. And pivotally, when Jacky discovers Billy teaching Michael how to dance, a squaring-up of father and son is followed by Billy launching into a spectacular demonstration of his ability, triggering his father's capitulation in the form of an agreement to support his son's ambition. Hence a confrontation of mining and ballet, crossed with generational conflict, takes centre stage, but is inextricably intertwined with Billy, Jacky and Tony's mutual obstinacy.

On a similar note, as Petrie intimates, there are aspects of Liam's character that prevent him from being read as a passive victim of 'class disadvantage' (Hill 2011: 186):

'Liam is presented as a bright and resourceful individual, generous to those he cares about, who ultimately craves a sense of normality but is caught between his responsibilities towards his sister, his hopes for a brighter future with his mother and his involvement in the local drug scene. But he also harbours a dark side, his unstable background having already made him fearless to the point of recklessness. This is evinced when, having been robbed of his drugs by three thugs, Liam relentlessly keeps on coming back at them, taking savage beatings in the process, until his drugs are returned. As Chantelle bathes his wounds, she reminds him of the way he behaved in the face of aggression at the children's home the two had once spend [sic] time in: "You didnae fight them because you were brave. You fought them because you didnae care what happened to you. That's what broke ma heart ... How can you really care for us when you don't care about yourself?"' (2004: 172).

In other words, whilst there is no question that Liam has been born into an unstable family background, is growing up in an area with high levels of socio-economic deprivation and its attendant consequences, and suffers one misfortune after another, it is essential to recognise, too, that he does have a degree of agency and makes some poor choices – a factor emphasised by not only his sister's repeated pleas to not 'waste' his life, but also her comparatively stable existence, as represented by her contrasting journey as a mother, movement to an adjacent town, success with her studies, and achievement of securing a part-time job in a call centre. For instance, despite being all too aware of how the use of illegal drugs can lead to mental health issues, poverty, family breakdown, and so on, Liam's scheme to buy the caravan and then flat for his mother rests on working for Mr Douglas (Jon Morrison), who controls the local drug trade, with Liam conveniently putting to one side any uncomfortable feelings of hypocrisy. And despite his sister's warnings that their mother 'is a fucking crazy, mixed up, lost, wee soul', who will 'ruin' Liam because she not only 'doesnae care', but 'cannae care', he persists in trying to cut off his mother's relationship with her boyfriend, with the disastrous outcome described above. In a nutshell, Liam does not always help himself.

(iii) The Three Main Trajectories for Working-Class Boys

Whilst *Billy Elliot* (2000) and *Sweet Sixteen* (2002) depict very different kinds of coming-of-age processes for their working-class male protagonists – emblematic opposites, even – there are, as outlined in Chapter Two, actually three main types of trajectory in the contemporary British coming-of-age film, broadly comparable to Moretti's division of the European *Bildungsroman* into stories of successful or failed individualisation and socialisation (the 'classical' and 'late' modes), and those with more ambivalent outcomes (the 'new' or 'realistic' mode). Indeed, this configuration manifests itself clearly in the tales of working-class adolescent males, where there is a pronounced variation in the course of the protagonists, which, roughly speaking, may be divided into upwards, downwards, and somewhere in-between – with those films with pairs of protagonists and ensemble casts sometimes juxtaposing these different directions. That is, whilst some protagonists end up escaping or transcending a limiting and/or troubled background, or having a reconciliatory or otherwise empowering experience, others are left 'immobilised by their situation and unable to act, or only able to respond to adverse circumstances and events that are outside their control' (Hallam with Marshment 2000: 194). However, most frequently, the protagonist is, by the close of the narrative, neither lifted up nor pushed down but, instead, ambivalent about the growing up process, having made gains and losses, and at a kind of crossroads and looking likely to move forward in a positive direction. As Birgitta Steene notes: 'As a plot device the open ending is a recurrent convention in the coming of age film, suggesting the beginning of a new life period rather than emphasizing the ending of a story' (Steene 1992: 36 paraphrased by Lysne 2016: 134).

More specifically, as observed by one of the participants in a discussion of coming-of-age films on BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* (22nd January 2015), 'We're very good at quite bleak films, like *Kes* – about coming of age in a tragic sense', and correspondingly, there are ten films which end sadly or with a sense of foreboding – *Babylon* (1980), *Made in Britain* (1983), *Ratcatcher* (1999), *Care* (2000), *A.K.A.* (2002), *Sweet Sixteen* (2002), *Kidulthood* (2006), *Control* (2007), *Summer Scars* (2007) and *Better Things* (2008). By contrast, eleven films close on an unabashedly buoyant note – *Wild West* (1992), *Beautiful Thing* (1996), *A Room for Romeo Brass* (1999), *Human Traffic* (1999), *Billy Elliot* (2000), *There's Only One Jimmy Grimble* (2000), *Pure* (2002), *Starter for Ten* (2006), *Cemetery Junction* (2010), *Soulboy* (2010) and *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2015). And most commonly, a somewhat indeterminate conclusion, imbued with a sense of promise, is illustrated in twenty-eight films – *Quadrophenia* (1979), *Scum* (1979), *That Sinking Feeling* (1979), *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), *Shopping* (1994), *Small Faces* (1996), *Twenty Four Seven* (1997), *Twin Town* (1997), *East is East* (1999), *Rage* (1999), *Purely Belter* (2000), *Gabriel and Me* (2001), *Bullet Boy* (2004), *This is England* (2006), *Adulthood* (2008), *Cass* (2008), *Somers Town* (2008), *The Firm* (2009), *Neds* (2010), *Shank* (2009), *Shank* (2010), *Anuvahood* (2011), *Attack the Block* (2011), *My Brother the Devil* (2012), *Starred Up* (2013), *The Selfish Giant* (2013) and *The Goob* (2015). Importantly, some of the films in the last category are somewhat resistant to such classification, with the death of either a parent, a parent figure, an older brother or a best friend edging the stories towards the tragic mode. Nevertheless, in all cases, grief is, crucially, counterbalanced by the sense that those remaining will go on to, if not flourish, at least recover and move on, turning a sad state of affairs into a situation that is altogether more equivocal in tone.

(iv) Upwards Trajectories

Of the upwards trajectories, there are two main narrative arcs: (1) experiencing upwards social mobility by leaving a restrictive working-class home life in order to receive an education from a middle/upper-class institution and, in some cases, pursue a vocation or career; and (2) overcoming the trials of unrequited lust or love and/or tests of friendship and/or the challenges of an unstable family life. The first narrative arc pertains to *Billy Elliot* (2000), *Starter for Ten* (2006) and *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2015), where transformations into, respectively, a ballet dancer, a university student, and an agent for an international intelligence agency, see the protagonists leave behind working-class families and communities that are no longer capable of providing the most favourable conditions in which to grow and thrive, and enter into middle/upper-class spheres where they develop skills and relationships which allow them to, in the case of Billy and Eggsy, excel in a certain profession, and in the case of Brian, settle into university life. They are 'coming of age narratives rooted in ... populist, bourgeois social affirmation' (Dave 2013: 747) – 'fairy tales' (Moretti 2000: 185), even, in the case of Billy and Eggsy – running along the lines of the European 'classical' *Bildungsroman*, as identified by Moretti, in which '[o]ne's formation as an individual in and for oneself coincides without rifts with one's social integration as a

simple *part of a whole*' (2000: 16), and of which 'social mobility ... is such an essential trait' (2000: x). Furthermore, they echo portrayals of working-class life in British cinema of the 1980s more generally, which 'retain a concern, characteristic of the 1960s films', namely, that 'they often focus on characters who wish to escape from the constrictions imposed upon them by their class position' (Hill 1999: 167). Indeed, when Alderson claims that *Billy Elliot* (2000) 'exploits a form with a long tradition in working-class writing: that of the exceptional individual who leaves his class behind' (2011: 11), he could also be referring to *Starter for Ten* (2006) and *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2015).

The second narrative arc is embodied in *Beautiful Thing* (1996), *A Room for Romeo Brass* (1999), *Human Traffic* (1999), *There's Only One Jimmy Grimble* (2000), *Pure* (2002), *Cemetery Junction* (2010) and *Soulboy* (2010), where a concluding sense of contentment or fulfilment derives not from an educational achievement or the establishment of a vocation or career but, rather, from a confirmation of mutual attraction and/or an affirmation of friendship and/or familial reconciliation, which comes after the surmountation of various obstacles. More specifically, in terms of relationships with girlfriends and boyfriends: Jamie and Ste of *Beautiful Thing* (1996) reach a point where they can no longer bear to keep their sexual orientation and relationship a secret, revealing their feelings for one another by dancing together in public; Jip of *Human Traffic* (1999) manages to conquer his sexual performance anxiety when he sleeps with his female best friend; Freddie of *Cemetery Junction* (2010) essentially persuades his childhood sweetheart to leave her fiancé and go travelling with him; and Jo of *Soulboy* (2010) eventually realises that he is in love with the girl who has been a helpful and loyal friend to him, not the girl whom he has been trying to impress. Comparatively, in the films in which family relations and/or friendships are paramount: Romeo and Gavin of *A Room for Romeo Brass* (1999) make up after an adult whom they befriend comes between them – their collaboration in a magic show that they put on for their families, a testament to their bond, with Romeo's role as Gavin's assistant, clear compensation for previous disloyalty; Jimmy of *There's Only One Jimmy Grimble* (2000) gets to not only kiss a girl whom he has long fancied, but also see his mother back together with a man whom he would be happy to call Dad; and Paul of *Pure* (2002) does all that he can to help his mother beat her heroin addiction, and to protect his younger brother, with the state's enforced separation of the boys from their mother followed by a reunion in the form of a family trip to watch their local football team play at home.

Nevertheless, as productive as it is to pinpoint these two main narrative arcs, it is also imperative to acknowledge that some of the films in question intertwine educational and professional matters with more personal concerns, especially in their closing scenes. Billy's performance on the stage of London's Theatre Royal Haymarket is watched by his father, brother and childhood best friend. Brian's decision to return to university, after he embarrasses himself by cheating on *University Challenge*, is set alongside his newfound commitment to Rebecca. Eggsy's immediate reward for saving the world is, in a kind of homage to or parody of the James Bond franchise, a Swedish Princess inviting him to have

anal sex with her. And Jimmy's kiss and realisation that his mother is back with her former boyfriend is framed within a closing sequence that sees him deliver a stellar performance in a football match, leading to the offer of a training place with Manchester United Football Club. Berghahn may identify 'the family' and 'the peer group' as 'the two most significant poles' (2010: 241) in the coming-of-age process, but it is arguable that such a scheme fails to consider the role of formal education and/or paid work in the transition from childhood to adulthood and, thereby, underappreciates the part that it plays in many depictions of adolescence – even when, in the case of Jip and Freddie, it is a lack of interest which defines their attitude towards it. Indeed, much drama is generated by the tension between a protagonist's family relations, friends, educational endeavours and professional pursuits – with resolution brought about by the protagonist's successful management of these different aspects of his life.

(v) Downwards Trajectories

In comparison with the tales of betterment, the films that finish on a pessimistic or ominous note are marked by two dominant features. Firstly, the killing or suicide of the protagonist or another significant figure is a pivotal event in many of the narratives: Carlin of *Scum* (1979) ends up in solitary confinement after initiating a riot when a fellow inmate commits suicide; *Ratcatcher* (1999) begins with the death of a young boy named Ryan Quinn (Thomas McTaggart), and appears to end with James's suicide; Davey of *Care* (2000) and Curtis of *Control* (2007) commit suicide; in *Kidulthood* (2006), Trife is beaten to death with a baseball bat; the protagonists of *Summer Scars* (2007) escape a hostage situation of sorts only after one of them shoots and kills their captor; and *Better Things* (2008) sets its young protagonists' persistent drug use against a heroin-induced death in the film's opening sequence. Secondly, there is no reconciliation of family relations, friendships, and educational and professional undertakings, as seen in the aforementioned stories of empowerment. Rather, the narratives put under the spotlight the various forces that militate against their protagonists and push them to the brink – demonstrating, in particular, that disenfranchisement comprises a complex network of issues, and blurring, especially, the distinction between cause and effect, and victimhood and agency. In the same way that coming-of-age films depicting successful individualisation and socialisation may be said to emulate Moretti's formulation of the European 'classical' *Bildungsroman*, so those which, alternatively, portray a troubled or failed transition from childhood to adulthood, may be fruitfully aligned with his conception of the 'late' *Bildungsroman* (2000).

For example, socio-economic disadvantage is hinted at in the opening scene of *Made in Britain* (1983), where Trevor is sentenced for shoplifting, which the judge makes clear is a repeat offence. However, it is never held up as an excuse for or explanation of delinquency, with other components feeding into the film's portrayal of alienation in ways that prevent any straight line being drawn between socio-economic status and criminality – any efforts to pin down Trevor's character, particularly his conscience, confounded by the unsettling

juxtaposition of, on the one hand, racist language, and acts of vandalism and violence, and on the other hand, moments of vulnerability. Indeed, such complexity is illustrated exceptionally well in a sequence in which a shop window display of a mannequin nuclear family in a mock living room appears to strike a chord with him, provoking him to run through a shopping centre shouting, 'Bollocks!', and then deliberately walk in the road through a tunnel and, as a car approaches, strip off his t-shirt, kick at the passing vehicle and yell, 'Fucking wanker!' after the driver. Whilst such behaviour may be interpreted as symptomatic of envy or jealousy of other people's spending power, the way in which the price tags are highly visible but never singled out by the camera, coupled with the incredulity and disdain on Trevor's face, and the appreciable absence of family in the narrative, indicates that the reaction is not so much a bitter response to middle-class consumerism, as anger at the presentation of the family unit as aspirational and commodifiable. Thus Trevor's disintegration is depicted as a possible consequence of not only socio-economic disenfranchisement, but also familial tension – the latter arguably crystallised in an episode in which he and his Residential Assessment Centre roommate Errol (Terry Richards) break into a cupboard containing their confidential personal files, and Trevor, after reading some of Errol's aloud, instructs Errol to defecate on the paperwork, whilst he urinates on the contents of the bottom drawer of a filing cabinet which he believes holds his own file.

Taking an example from the next decade, material hardship is an issue that looms large in *Ratcatcher* (1999), with much emphasis put upon James's family's money worries and the run-down condition of their neighbourhood – his bus trip to a smart housing estate being built amongst fields on the outskirts of Glasgow, which he appears to have a vision of as he seems to drown, providing an effective contrast. Yet there is much to suggest that his apparent suicide is not so much a reaction to or result of poverty, as an expression of latent guilt for not calling for help when Ryan began to drown during a play fight and ended up dying. Likewise, from the last decade, just as film critic Peter Bradshaw opines of *Control* (2007) that its 'stunning high-contrast monochrome' 'perversely turn[s] Macclesfield's grimness into grandeur' and 'effortlessly revives a British cinematic style that you might call beautiful realism' (Bradshaw 2007), so Dave ties the film's 'inviting vision of the milieu' to the observation that '[t]he alienations of working-class life do not hang heavy in th[e] film' (2013: 765), and that 'if Curtis does not have control, this is not because of some oppressive social determinism' but, rather, because he is 'convulsed with a sense of obligations that he cannot manage' (2013: 767).

Indeed, when it comes to considering the tragic mode of the contemporary British coming-of-age film with a working-class protagonist, the range of factors that are shown to enfeeble are framed as certainly linked to socio-economic disadvantage, but not reducible to it – delinquency (*Made in Britain* [1983], *Care* [2000], *Sweet Sixteen* [2002], *Kidulthood* [2006] and *Summer Scars* [2008]), family breakdown (*Ratcatcher* [1999], *Care* [2000], *A.K.A.* [2002], *Sweet Sixteen* [2002], and *Control* [2007]), sexual abuse (*Care* [2002] and *A.K.A.*

[2002]), illegal drugs (*Sweet Sixteen* [2002], *Kidulthood* [2006] and *Better Things* [2008]), substance abuse (*Made in Britain* [1983]), machismo (*Made in Britain* [1983], *Sweet Sixteen* [2002], *Kidulthood* [2006] and *Summer Scars* [2008]), guilt (*Ratcatcher* [1999], *Care* [2000] and *Control* [2008]), and the pressures of fame (*Control* [2008]). Unlike in the social problem film, as discussed in Chapter Two, where a deviant adolescent is typically brought under the control of the parent culture, these films resist any straightforward diagnosis of disenfranchisement and do not present any solutions to the types of problems faced by the protagonists, offering, instead, honest portraits that encourage the audience to embrace complexity of characterisation and ambiguity of interpretation.

(vi) Ambivalent Trajectories

In terms of the most common type of trajectory – where there is no happy or sad ending but, instead, a sense of lessons learned and a likely positive way forward – the identification of dominant patterns is impeded by the sheer range of concerns across such a large body of work. Nevertheless, amidst the diversity, a trio of paradigms stand out. Firstly, about a third of the narratives at hand are marked by a death – specifically, of a father in *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* (1988), *Twin Town* (1997) and *Gabriel and Me* (2001), a father figure in *Twenty Four Seven* (1997), an older brother in *Small Faces* (1996), *Bullet Boy* (2004) and *Shank* (2010), and a best friend in *The Selfish Giant* (2013) – but are saved from becoming outright tales of despair by virtue of their emphasis upon the generally positive legacy of the deceased and the resilience of those who remain. Secondly, *Quadrophenia* (1979), *This is England* (2006) and *My Brother the Devil* (2012) demonstrate how enchantment with a certain subculture and individual within that subculture can turn to disillusionment and, in turn, enlightenment. And thirdly, *Scum* (1979), *That Sinking Feeling* (1979), *Shopping* (1994), *Purely Belter* (2000), *Adulthood* (2008), *Neds* (2010), *Anuvahood* (2011), *Attack the Block* (2011) and *Starred Up* (2013) are typified by a sense of moral ambivalence about adolescent criminality, imbuing the various delinquent or incarcerated protagonists with not only a certain vulnerability, but also more agreeable traits, such as kindness, courage, creativity and initiative, which are, crucially, pushed to the fore.

With regard to the first model, for example, although the protagonists of *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* (1988), *Twin Town* (1997) and *Gabriel and Me* (2001) are shown losing their fathers, the tone of the films' closing sequences connotes that all is not lost. Tony may be pictured crying (see footnote 55), but he and his wife are then waved off cheerily by their guests, and then last glimpsed smiling at one another in the back of a taxi, as members of their family walk off into the night to the rich and warm soundtrack of *O Waly Waly* (performed by Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears). Likewise, after granting their father's wish to be buried at sea, Julian and Jeremy are last seen on a boat heading away from Mumbles, talking of Morocco as a destination, as a local all-male choir stands on Mumbles Pier and sings the popular Welsh song *Myfanwy*. And the concluding image of Jimmy is a literally and metaphorically uplifting vision of him being thrown playfully into the air by his father

(possibly a memory), redressing the sorrow of the previous scene in which he follows his dying father's instruction to 'fly' to him by lying on top of a pillow over his face in order to bring the pain and indignity of lung cancer to an end.

Analogously, *Twenty Four Seven* (1997) ends with the death of Darcy (Bob Hoskins), a middle-aged man who sets up a boxing club for, in his words, 'lads' who 'have been living the same day their whole lives' because 'none of them is singularly strong enough to break away and say, "Wait a minute, there must be more than this"'. Providing a 'space' in which they 'must master control', and even taking them on a trip from their home in the Midlands to the Welsh countryside in order 'to encourage a sense of communality among the "lost boys"' (Godfrey 2013: 856), Darcy is, for much of the film, 'the only positive male role model in a community dominated by ineffectual or abusive fathers' (Godfrey 2013: 857). Hence although 'an outburst of unregulated physical brutality and raw anger' at one point 'undermines [his] authority as a restorative father figure' (Godfrey 2013: 858), the talking heads-style credits serve as not only an update on the lives of the adolescent protagonists, but also a vindication of his guidance. Set in the church in which his funeral is held, and sandwiched by the start and end of the funeral itself, this 'bittersweet coda' (Godfrey 2013: 859) suggests that the various adolescent protagonists, whom he did his best to help, have become responsible young men, and that they have him to thank, at least in part, for their socialisation.

Similarly, whilst the younger brothers in *Bullet Boy* (2004) and *Shank* (2010) end up losing their older brothers to London gang violence, the latter's mentorship of the former is not only cast as intrinsic to the coming-of-age process for the siblings, but also accentuated in the palpable optimism of the final scenes. In accordance with Ricky's efforts to discourage Curtis from following in his footsteps, from gang culture to incarceration and back to gang culture, Curtis's response to Ricky's murder is to throw Ricky's gun into a canal and, with a resolute expression upon his face, stare at the spot where it sinks, implying a rejection of the kind of lifestyle that led to his brother's murder. As Dave opines: 'Here, two brothers ... are used to split the task of coming of age. Black youth (Ricky) attempts and fails to live the coming of age which black childhood (Curtis) needs to skip to survive. In dying, the youth provides a sacrificial double which saves the child' (2013: 747). Fittingly, the film's tag line is 'You only get one shot at life.' Analogously, in congruence with Rager's tutelage of Junior in the art of self-defence, Junior's last voiceover is both aspirational and philosophical, stating that he wants 'to be strong like Rager', 'make him proud', and that he has learned to 'try and find where the beauty's hiding ... in the squalor' – sentiments which are, appropriately, capped by a slow-motion flashback of good-natured horseplay between the two brothers.

In a consonant vein, although the gang-based murder of older brother Bobby causes Lex deep anxiety about the future – 'How's it gonna be alright?!' he asks an adolescent girl called Joanne Macgowan (Laura Fraser) exasperatedly – *Small Faces* (1996) ends with an optimistic voiceover, 'Luckily, when I woke up, I was still a boy', denoting the end of a

‘nightmare’ in which he ‘grew hair all over [him] ... had body odour ... suffered from uncontrollable, senseless impulses ... felt responsible for everything ... dreamt [he] was a man!’ Indeed, the use of *In the Year 2525* (performed by Dennis Zager and Rick Evans) may sound an ominous note during the closing credits, but the ‘final shot [of Lex] by a sunny window, painting in the bedroom that is now his alone’, with Alan having moved away to attend art school, is an ‘idyllic scene’ indicating that Lex ‘may follow Alan into a successful life of the imagination’ (Clandfield and Lloyd 2005: 199). Likewise, in *The Selfish Giant* (2013), which focuses not upon siblings, but two best friends, the sudden and shocking death of Swifty – for which Arbor is, in part, responsible – is followed by Arbor’s reconciliation with Swifty’s mother. And further to this, in clear contrast with an earlier episode in which Swifty stops Arbor from cruelly using a foal to check if a fallen power line is live, the film’s final image is of Arbor grooming a horse with the kind of care and affection that Swifty had demonstrated in earlier scenes.

In a variation upon the fatalities that mark *Twenty Four Seven* (1997) et al, *Quadrophenia* (1979), *This is England* (2006) and *My Brother the Devil* (2012) use the metaphorical death of a mentor figure to punctuate the portrayal of adolescent maturation – showing how a subculture can provide a sense of belonging, a type of guidance, and a form of resistance to bourgeois hegemony, but may also be characterised by superficiality and violence, leading to an individual’s discontentment with the ‘scene’, and a decision to strike out on one’s own instead. In *Quadrophenia* (1979), Jimmy’s discovery of the Mod scene initially provides an escape from the drudgery of his job as a post room boy in an advertising firm and the constrictions of living with his parents in suburban London. However, when he finds out that a certain Mod girl, with whom he had sex at the infamous 1964 Whitsun weekend clash between Mods and Rockers, has gone on to date his best friend, and that his Mod idol, ‘Ace Face’ (Sting), works as a humble bellboy at a Brighton hotel, he is compelled, in a symbolic rejection of Mod culture, to shout, ‘Me!’, and propel Ace’s scooter off Beachy Head. Similarly, encouraged into a white nationalist movement, chiefly, by Andrew/‘Combo’ Gascoigne (Stephen Graham), who foists upon the boy the status of mascot, Shaun in *This is England* (2006) attends a meeting and joins in with a racist attack against Indian corner shop owner, Mr Sandhu (Kriss Dosanjh). But when Combo beats black British Michael/‘Milky’ (Andrew Shim) into a state of unconsciousness, hospitalising him, Shaun finally understands just how nasty Combo and his ilk can be – his rejection of them symbolised when he throws Combo’s gift of a St George’s flag into the sea. Likewise, Mo in *My Brother the Devil* (2012) is enamoured of his older brother, Rashid, and the gang to which Rashid belongs, becoming involved in the gang’s drug dealing, despite his academic potential exemplified by his promising G.C.S.E. results. Thus he is confused when he discovers that Rashid has embarked upon a sexual relationship with another man, and naively betrays Rashid’s secret to the gang. Nevertheless, Mo’s anger with Rashid gives way to a fierce act of loyalty, tackling a gang member who is about to shoot Rashid, and although

this results in personal injury and Rashid's departure from the family home, there is, eventually, a reconciliation of the two brothers.

Finally, *Scum* (1979), *That Sinking Feeling* (1979), *Shopping* (1994), *Purely Belter* (2000), *Adulthood* (2008), *Neds* (2010), *Anuvahood* (2011), *Attack the Block* (2011) and *Starred Up* (2013) explore delinquency and incarceration but, importantly, counterbalance criminality with moral decency, often underscoring the latter in their closing sequences. For instance, incarcerated, respectively, in a borstal and a prison, the protagonists of *Scum* (1979) and *Starred Up* (2013) are both shown to have a dangerous side. Carlin's capacity for violence is revealed when he uses makeshift coshes – one out of a sock and two snooker balls, and another out of a piece of wood – in order to establish himself as the 'Daddy' of both A-wing and B-wing. And whilst the reason for Eric's early transfer from a Young Offender Institution to an adult prison is never divulged, there are a number of episodes in which he demonstrates a physical ruthlessness, such as when he 'shanks' another inmate, clamps his jaws over a prison officer's testicles, and beats up his fellow inmate and father, Neville Love (Ben Mendelsohn), for being 'prison gay'/'jail gay'/'gay on the inside' (Casey 2015). However, it is equally imperative to note that Carlin is actually serving time for his brother, and that when he assumes the position of 'Daddy', he takes care to never abuse anyone younger than him. Moreover, whilst the final shot is of him being dragged into solitary confinement after inciting a riot to protest the cover-up of a fellow inmate's suicide, his leadership of a collective expression of anger at the wilful negligence of borstal staff is impressive, with one film critic going so far as to claim that:

'Within the naturalistic framework there's a rattling good tale in the staunch tradition of Hollywood liberalism. The hero, a clear victim of injustice, overcomes the system, holds to his integrity, vanquishes the villains and establishes a new and, it's implied, more principled order' (Copperlily website, 2016).

Indeed, this interpretation is echoed by another film critic who asserts that: 'This brutal but intelligent drama chronicles one youth's fight for dignity in the midst of a violent and oppressive environment' (Copperlily website, 2016). Analogously, when Eric and Neville end up in solitary confinement, and Neville calls out desperately and persistently to Eric to check that he is okay, Eric eventually breaks his stubborn silence and the father-son bond is reignited, leading to a concluding sequence that sets up a clear contrast between the comfort of unconditional paternal and filial love, and the brutality of corrupt prison staff unfit to be in loco parentis – Neville rescuing Eric from being hanged by the Deputy Governor and two prison officers, and Eric and Neville exchanging kind words and an embrace of sorts before Neville is transferred.

Relatedly, *Shopping* (1994) and *Adulthood* (2008) portray young men who have just been released from prison for, respectively, theft and murder, and as with *Scum* (1979) and *Starred Up* (2013), these narratives complicate criminality by refusing to demonise those who perpetrate it. Billy's initial response to the question of whether or not prison has

‘taught’ him anything is ‘Don’t get caught’ and, accordingly, he continues to joyride high-performance cars. However, several details – such as the notable absence of his mother, the discovery that his father has given up on him, the admission that the thought of returning to prison ‘scares the shit out of [him]’, the obvious contrast between his poverty and the expensive cars that he steals to ram-raid upmarket shops, his labelling of shoppers as ‘the living dead’, and a conversation that reveals the impossibility of securing rented accommodation and credit – conspire to transform him into a more sympathetic character, arguably framing his final ram raid on the allegedly impenetrable Retailand shopping centre as a heroic act of rebellion against the inherent inequities of a capitalist, consumerist society. Comparatively, Sam sets about building a law-abiding life and learning to control his temper in the face of extreme provocation from people seeking revenge for Trife’s murder, thereby, essentially rehabilitated by the sequel to the film in which he is the chief antagonist.

Taking a slightly more light-hearted approach, *That Sinking Feeling* (1979) and *Purely Belter* (2000) depict the quirky crimes of, respectively, a group of unemployed Glaswegians, and a pair of diehard Newcastle United fans from unstable family backgrounds, drawing attention to the limited life chances of socio-economically disadvantaged youth, whilst also emphasising their irrepressibility in the face of deprivation, and generating comedy out of their misfortune and mistakes. Opening with an insincere disclaimer that ‘Any resemblance to any real town called Glasgow is purely coincidental’, *That Sinking Feeling* (1979) follows, primarily, Ronnie, Wal (Billy Greenlees), Andy (John Gordon Sinclair) and Vic (John Hughes) as they plot to steal and sell on stainless steel sinks. And crucially, although their lack of capital is highlighted at regular points throughout the narrative, and they remain unemployed until the end, their disaffection is consistently played for laughs, with their transgression of the law taking the form of a series of bizarre escapades, from dressing up as cleaning women, to inventing a drug that causes suspended animation in human beings (and, it turns out, cats), to gorging themselves on stolen doughnuts acquired via a farcical case of confusion involving identical vans. Similarly, Gerry and Sewell of *Purely Belter* (2000) endeavour to raise enough money to purchase season tickets for their beloved football club by, at first, scrapping and babysitting, but then, shoplifting, housebreaking and, most seriously, attempting a bank robbery. And again, crime is portrayed as a catalogue of capers, as opposed to a descent into a dangerous existence, with the protagonists ending up with two hundred hours of community service each, but shown, in the closing sequence, watching their team play at home when it transpires that an old lady, whom they have been assigned to help, happens to live in a flat overlooking St James’ Park. Hence both films are socially conscious – commenting upon, respectively, the bleak prospects facing school leavers at a time when Scottish industries were in decline, and the way that young working-class football fans are unfairly discriminated against by an industry whose gentrification has eroded equity of access. However, they also characterise those adversely affected as

resourceful enough to challenge the social system that disenfranchises them, using humour as a counterpoint to the serious subtext.

In a consonant manner, *Anuvahood* (2011) combines criminality with moral fortitude and gives the subject matter comic treatment by parodying the urban youth film. After quitting his job at Laimsbury's and, thereby, causing financial hardship for his family, 'wannabe-gangsta' K attempts a small-scale drug-dealing operation with a gang of social misfits in order to rectify the situation. But when his earnings are stolen by a more established dealer, he returns to Laimsbury's and adopts a more pragmatic outlook, even putting to one side his unrealistic dream of becoming a Grime MC:

'Listen, you've got to know who you are out here, blud. You get me? There comes a time when a man's just got to wake up and smell the coffee, blud. This road ting ain't get a man nowhere, blud. See me? I'm on a different ting now, blud. I'm choosing life. See, it's all about enlightenment. ... Listen, man. I ain't trying to preach, yeah? I'm just saying life is about choices, alright? And you've got to make the right ones. Nah, you ain't gonna see K on a hype no more, man. I'm telling you, blud, it's a new day, a new start. I'm gonna flip it. See me? I've seriously changed, man.'

In a humorous twist on the typically tragic yet hopeful conclusions of urban youth films, the concluding sequence sees K mocked by his boss but praised by his parents – the final shots showing him exchanging a knowing smile with a young female customer who, it turns out, shares his love of Fruitella.

Lastly, *Neds* (2010) centres upon John, who is first shown as a 'shy, bookish child' (Murray 2015: 171) winning an award in his last year of primary school, but whose difficult family background, humiliation and suffering at the hands of teachers, experience of snobbery, and relationship with older brother Benny (Joe Szula), who is an especially notorious member of one of Glasgow's numerous male teenage gangs, conspire to transform him into a 'ned' – a 'non-educated delinquent', according to the title sequence⁵⁹, or 'a hooligan or petty criminal, a stupid or loutish boy or man' (Concise Oxford Dictionary). As Bradshaw opines:

'*Neds* turns on one single piece of class pettiness of the kind I associate with England more than Scotland, but which is probably universal. The lead character is briefly taken up and then dropped by a richer, middle-class boy; deeply hurt in ways he could never articulate, he angrily and fatefully turns back to the vocation he'd hoped to avoid: gangs, knives and crime' (Bradshaw 2011).

More specifically, encouraged by a visiting aunt to believe that his 'dreams are going to come true ... just work hard', but intimidated by his abusive and alcoholic father, let down by his submissive mother, and judged harshly – firstly, by teachers at his secondary school, who suspect that he will turn out to be a troublemaker like his older brother, and secondly,

⁵⁹ According to journalist Cath Clarke:

"'ned' is 'a word that's alien to pretty much anyone outside Scotland. Neds aren't tartan cousins of chavs – for one thing, they've been around for decades. Mullan reckons the most credible explanation for the origins of the word is that it's a variant of the suited-and-booted teddy boys: English teds became Scottish neds. But he also likes the acronym that has ended up being part of the film's title sequence: non-educated delinquents. "It appealed, because here's a story about a boy who is obviously educated, or wants to be. All the forces conspire to prevent him"' (2016).

by the mother of a middle-class friend – John becomes less of a scholar and more of a rebel as he grows up. Joining the Young Car-Ds, the younger wing of the gang to whom Benny belongs, he is brought into a world of cyclical violence – nearly killing Cantá (Gary Milligan), a boy who threatened him a couple of years before; throwing fireworks in football boots through the middle-class friend's front window as he and his mother are eating, yelling, 'Yies want a ned, I'll gie ye a fuckin' ned'; and beating up his father, causing his mother to throw him out. Thus it is understandable that Murray labels John a 'good boy gone bad' (Murray 2015: 170) and, like Bradshaw, identifies the way in which he is '[f]atally wounded by ... rejection' (Murray 2015: 171) as pivotal to his descent into instability. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognise that the final scene serves to redeem John to some extent: 'During a school visit to a local safari park, [he] and the now brain-damaged Cantá abscond, wandering away from the camera through a field of grazing lions' (Murray 2015: 171), and crucially, his guidance of Cantá by the hand indicates that he has retained a degree of kindness, and gained a sense of remorse and responsibility, suggesting rehabilitation and a brighter future.

(vii) Conclusion

It can be seen, then, that in spite of the generic hybridity, and thematic, formal and stylistic diversity of the forty-nine boy-centred contemporary British coming-of-age films in a social realist vein, there are discernible lines of continuity. Firstly, the narratives divide clearly into three main types of trajectory – optimistic, pessimistic and ambivalent – echoing the general shape of the European *Bildungsroman*, as characterised by Moretti (2000). And secondly, there are definite patterns within the treatment of each trajectory. The upwards trajectories tend to take the form of educational/professional achievements and/or eventual fulfilment in personal relationships. The downwards trajectories usually involve the death of either a protagonist or a significant other, and typically intersect various types of disenfranchisement in ways that may be but are not necessarily connected to socio-economic disenfranchisement. The inconclusive trajectories counterbalance positives and negatives, such as: the good influence of a certain figure, with the death of that figure; the allure of a certain subculture, with the realisation that the scene is not quite all that it appears to be; and the problem of criminality, with acts of redemption. Berghahn may base her formulation of the 'diasporic coming-of-age film' (2010: 241) upon the notion that a coming-of-age film invariably ends with a sense of resolution for the protagonist, and Dave may choose to, alternatively, put to one side those coming-of-age films illustrating the successful individualisation and socialisation of working-class protagonists (2013: 747), and focus, instead, upon 'the inherently problematic attempt to imagine a successful working-class coming of age' (2013: 746), but in doing so, both offer a partial insight into the coming-of-age genre and its specific manifestation in contemporary European/British cinema.

Furthermore, it is essential to recognise the lively play of victimhood and agency in contemporary British coming-of-age films with working-class male protagonists – with a protagonist's personality traits cast as equally significant in influencing outcomes, as

external factors – and how, on balance, the majority of the stories are more hopeful than not, refusing to pigeon-hole working-class boys as straightforward casualties of socio-economic disadvantage. On one level, this is borne out by the fact that only about a fifth of the films end tragically. However, more powerfully, the vast majority of the narratives frame a level of relative poverty as certainly detrimental to development, but not completely destructive – a form of appeal, perhaps, to the popular notion of the underdog whose strength of character allows them to, at least to some extent, transcend their lowly circumstances.

Brothers

If there is any one salient feature of the scholarship on contemporary British coming-of-age films, it is a preoccupation with the role of fathers and father figures. The ‘unmoveable patriarchs’ (Leggott 2008: 99) of *East is East* (1999) and *Billy Elliot* (2000) are discussed by, respectively, Korte and Sternberg (2004), Malik (2010) and Berghahn (2013⁶⁰), and Hill (2004), Leggott (2004) and Alderson (2011). And as Martin Fradley and Seán Kingston assert, ‘[a]nyone familiar with Meadows’ films will know that fathers – both real and symbolic – abound in the director’s body of work’ (2013: 171), examining, accordingly, a range of representations of fathers and father figures in Meadows’s *oeuvre*, alongside Godfrey (2013), Rydzewska (2013) and Steans (2013). Indeed, from the occasionally kind but predominantly cold and sadistic father of *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988), to the distant yet conscientious Jewish fathers of *Wondrous Oblivion* (2003) and *Sixty Six* (2006), and from the faith-healing father figure of Taliesin’s piano teacher in *The Testimony of Taliesin Jones* (2000), to the depressed and terminally-ill father in *Gabriel and Me* (2001), fathers and father figures have a powerful and varied presence in contemporary British coming-of-age films – so diverse, in fact, that even adopting Stella Bruzzi’s pragmatic distinction between ‘films that offer active discourses of fatherhood and those that merely happen to have fathers in them’ (2006: ix), they could easily constitute the basis of another chapter in the same way that Considine devotes two chapters to ‘Films’ Failed Fathers’ and ‘Discovering Dad’ (1985). More specifically, many of the fathers are, in themselves, complex characters – sometimes supportive; sometimes a role model; sometimes abusive; sometimes remote; sometimes troubled; and sometimes unreliable. Furthermore, the father figures alone include step-fathers, teachers, familiar figures in the community, and new arrivals in the neighbourhood. In addition, in some films, the father or father figure undergoes an evolutionary change that is not only akin to the growth of the adolescent protagonist(s), but

⁶⁰ Although the sequel to *East is East* (1999), *West is West* (2010), is not in the filmography, since most of it is set in Pakistan, it is worth noting that Berghahn’s discussion of George Khan pertains to both films, and that she also examines the role of father figure, Pir Naseem (Nadim Sawalha), during Sajid’s time in Pakistan, describing him as ‘a charismatic Sufi elder under whose gentle and loving tutelage [Sajid] is transformed’ (2013: 138).

also intertwined with it. And the impact of the absent father, usually because of death or desertion, is a significant dynamic in a number of films too.

Further to this, it is crucial to recognise that scholarship pertaining to fathers and father figures in contemporary British coming-of-age films bears a tendency to consider the characters within the context of a 'crisis of masculinity' – a term which, in the 1990s, 'became commonplace cultural shorthand for a diverse range of problems facing men', but whose "'sheer profusion of uses and applications" ... renders it unhelpfully nebulous' (Edwards 2006: 1 cited in Godfrey 2013: 846). As Monk states:

'To begin by quoting Thomas Elsaesser out of context, the 1990s could aptly be summarised as "hard times, interesting times" for men and masculinity as represented in the British cinema of the decade.⁶¹ Hard times, that is, for many of the male protagonists of 1990s British films; interesting times in terms of the emergence of men and masculinity as key themes of 1990s British cinema, and the diversity (and at best richness) of representations this engendered. To an almost unprecedented extent, 1990s British cinema seemed preoccupied with men and masculinity in crisis' (2000: 156).

For instance, Hill (2004), Leggott (2004), Fradley and Kingston (2013), Godfrey (2013), Rydzewska (2013) and Steans (2013) all connect their examination of fathers and father figures to ways in which the forces of Thatcherism and globalisation brought about a 'decline in manufacturing, and growth of long-term male employment, ... precipitating a weakening of the ideologies of masculinity which have traditionally underpinned both work and trade union action' (Hill 2004: 178). Pertinently, too, Powrie, Babington and Davies observe that, '[t]he study of men in film has assumed increasing importance since the 1990s'; for although '[t]he study of the representation of men in films has always been widespread in Film Studies', 'the systematic exploration of masculinities anchored in the gender paradigm ... [–] "Masculinities in Film Studies" for short – developed as an afterthought of the feminist-inspired spectatorship paradigm of the period 1975-1985' (2004: 1) and has burgeoned.

However, if fathers and father figures play an essential role in contemporary British coming-of-age films with male protagonists, so, too, do brothers. Portrayals of relationships between brothers are a notable trait, just as they may be observed in a plethora of films coming from various times and places – the BFI recommending as their top ten, for example: (1) *On the Waterfront* (1954), (2) *Rocco and His Brothers* (1960), (3) *The King of Marvin Gardens* (1972), (4) *Basket Case* (1982), (5) *My Brother's Wedding* (1983), (6) *Ran* (1985), (7) *The Funeral* (1996), (8) *Adaptation* (2002), (9) *Dead Man's Shoes* (2004) and (10) *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* (2007) (Clark 2016). For instance, the delinquent Julian and Jeremy of *Twin Town* (1997), played by real-life brothers, are not only of a similar age, but inseparable to the point of sharing a bathtub. And in *Summer Scars* (2007), Paul (Jonathan Jones) and Ben (Chris Conway) are good friends as well as brothers: 'They were

⁶¹ As Monk notes, 'Elsaesser's phrase originated as a comment on the impact of Thatcherism on 1980s British cinema' in 'Images for Sale: The "New" British Cinema' (2006).

involved in a car crash, which meant Ben couldn't walk, so Paul's always felt guilty about that and he's always looked after Ben because of that reason, and the fact that it's his little brother' (Jones, Soda Pictures DVD extra 'Making Of'). Similarly, a younger brother sometimes appears as a minor character, such as Lee (Vinnie Hunter) of *Pure* (2002), whom Harry shields from his mother's heroin addiction and her dealer, and Angus (Sam Pulsford) of *Hunky Dory* (2012), who, disturbed by his mother's abandonment of the family, projects his anger onto Davey's love interest, Stella (Danielle Branch), by accusing her of promiscuity – Lee's central function, to highlight Harry's moral courage, and Angus's, to provide an insight into some of the challenges facing Davey. Overall, though, it is older brothers who are of the greatest significance: Lex's brothers, Alan and Bobby, in *Small Faces* (1996); Billy's brother, Tony, in *Billy Elliot* (2000); Taliesin's brother, Jonathan (Matthew Rhys), in *The Testimony of Taliesin Jones* (2000); Curtis's brother, Ricky, in *Bullet Boy* (2004); Karim's brother, Faisal (Ace Bhatti), in *Bradford Riots* (2006); Bernie's brother, Alvie (Ben Newton), in *Sixty Six* (2006); John's brother, Benny, in *Neds* (2010); Junior's brother, Rager, in *Shank* (2010); Mo's brother, Rashid, in *My Brother the Devil* (2012); and Arbor's brother, Martin (Elliott Tittensor), in *The Selfish Giant* (2013).

To be precise, there are five main types of older brother in contemporary British coming-of-age films with male protagonists: the 'belligerent older brother who usurps most of the family's attention' (Goldsmith 2008⁶²) – Alvie; the antagonist-turned-ally – Tony, Jonathan, Faisal and Martin; the bad influence – Bobby and Benny; the positive role model – Alan and Rager; and the flawed idol – Ricky and Rashid. Sometimes drawn as of a similar temperament to their father, sometimes positioned as a contrasting force to their father's character, sometimes pictured as lacking the guidance of a father, and sometimes cast as a paternal presence in a fatherless family, they are fundamental components of the narratives at hand – shown to occupy a unique space in the lives of their younger brothers by, firstly, typically lacking the natural authority that a father has over a son but, nevertheless, imbued with a certain power by virtue of being older and related by blood, and secondly, embodying a particular route to manhood and version of masculinity for their younger brother to not only be a witness to, but also reflect upon and possibly imitate or reject. Moreover, whilst sibling rivalry is somewhat predictably figured as a source of dramatic tension, the older brothers essentially serve two primary functions – to obstruct or enable – and as with fathers and father figures, they sometimes do both, with their movement between the two modes usually from the former to the latter and represented as integral to the adolescent development of their younger brother. Indeed, in some cases, the older brother almost mentors the younger brother.

⁶² The context of the quotation is worth noting:

'There is a certain class of British film – for which John Boorman's *Hope and Glory* is perhaps the prototype – which follows an adolescent boy's coming of age during a notable or sentimentality-laced period of twentieth-century English history. Invariably in such films, there is a female object of incipient pubescent desire; a belligerent older brother who usurps most of the family's attention; and a redemptive father figure through whom the protagonist learns to stiffen his upper lip and be an Englishman. More often than not, the garden shed is a focal point of action' (Goldsmith 2008).

Bernie and Alvie's relationship in *Sixty Six* (2006), to begin with, echoes the dynamic between their father and uncle – the former, 'a morose loser', and the latter, 'a popular back-slapper and specialist in Jewish humour' (Ebert 2008). As Bernie's introduction to his life illustrates, he shares a bedroom and goes to school with Alvie, but they 'are not especially close', as exemplified by scenes of Alvie riding Bernie like a horse across the school playing field, and shining a torch in Bernie's face and shooting him with pellets as he tries to creep unnoticed to the toilet in the middle of the night. Likewise, when Bernie goes missing during his disappointingly understated bar mitzvah party and his parents subsequently discover his extensive planning workshop in the garage, a cine film projection of Alvie's contrastingly lavish celebration offers clear evidence that Bernie has long lived in his older brother's shadow. Hence Bernie's endeavours to coordinate a successful bar mitzvah, as detailed in Chapter Five, are inextricably intertwined with a classic case of sibling rivalry and, correspondingly, although the emphasis of the film's final scenes is, as also discussed in Chapter Five, Bernie's strengthened relationship with his father, it is notable, too, that Alvie becomes, if not friendlier, at least less hostile, whilst the uncle earns a degree of humility when he seriously injures himself. Bernie's transition from childhood to adulthood is framed, then, by a trio of dramatic devices that bring together issues of growing up and maleness – namely, a religious ceremony which, as the character of the blind rabbi puts it, is regarded as 'the day when a boy becomes a man'; a father-son relationship in need of reparation; and two cohorts⁶³ of pairs of brothers, the power structure amongst whom is reversed in final scenes, with the disempowered becoming empowered and vice versa. Furthermore, from Bernie's nervous father, mean brother and arrogant uncle, to his bullish classmates, well-intentioned if eccentric bar mitzvah class teacher (the aforementioned rabbi), and caring but troubled doctor, through to the footballers treated as heroes, *Sixty Six* (2006) offers a varied exploration of male coming of age – threading together an array of masculinities for its adolescent protagonist to engage with, thereby, recognising the heterogeneity of 'manhood' in its examination of what it means to 'become a man'.

In comparison, Tony, Jonathan, Faisal and Martin of, respectively, *Billy Elliot* (2000), *The Testimony of Taliesin Jones* (2000), *Bradford Riots* (2006) and *The Selfish Giant* (2013), are also drawn as overbearing types, but unlike Alvie, who is merely less spiteful by the end of the *Sixty Six* (2006), each one of these older brothers comes to support his younger brother through a difficult situation, revealing a kinder side to his personality. Tony – whose relationship with Billy, as Hill points out (2004: 103), is akin to that between Billy and Jud in *Kes* (1969) – is initially appalled by the discovery that his younger sibling has been going to ballet classes instead of boxing lessons, accusing Billy's ballet teacher of encouraging him to be a 'scab', and of seeking personal 'gratification', incredulous that anyone could care about anything other than the miners' strike. However, when their father realises that there will likely be no mine for Billy to work in, and that he could be denying Billy of an incredible

⁶³ 'The term *cohort* refers to generations within families' (Giddens and Sutton 2013: 392).

opportunity if he fails to support his ambition, Tony is prompted to change his stance too: 'Dad's right. Mum would have let you,' he admits to Billy afterwards and, in the next scene, appears in an apron emblazoned comically with matching bra and suspenders, a symbolic nod to their mother's absence. Consonantly, atheist Jonathan is markedly scornful of Taliesin's inability to rationalise his faith – 'If you want to believe something, fine; you've just got to be able to prove it,' he insists – but softens when the death of Taliesin's faith-healing piano teacher causes Taliesin to wander into a cave, shout, 'Why Billy?! God, what are you doing?! Where are you?! It's all lies, isn't it?! None of it's true! None of it! Fairy tales! There is no God! There is no God!', and faint, leading to his rescue by Jonathan, who reassures him, 'You believe what you want, okay? Don't listen to me.' Likewise, Faisal is distinctly resentful of Karim's escape from taking over the family business, conveniently failing to speak up about his own involvement in local riots when Karim is ordered by their father to hand himself in, and only confessing his own participation when armed police raid the family home. Nevertheless, he is a supportive presence at the police station and in the courtroom, keen to ensure that Karim's lawyer represents his younger sibling to the best of his ability. Analogously, although Martin cruelly labels Arbor a 'spaz' for being on ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) medication, and recklessly sells the tablets to settle a debt, he is last seen urging his younger brother, who, devastated by the death of his best friend, has taken to hiding under his bed, to 'come out' and have 'a brew' or 'a kickabout'. Thus it can be summated that a prominent figure within boy-centred contemporary British coming-of-age films is that of the older brother whose movement from adversary to helper is framed as critical to the protagonist's development.

By way of contrast, Benny of *Neds* (2010) does little other than set a bad example for his younger brother. As outlined in the section on 'Ambivalent Trajectories', John ends up joining the younger wing of the gang to which his infamous older brother belongs, and although this development is not drawn as the sole factor in his transformation from a studious primary school pupil into a 'ned', it is positioned as pivotal. John is introduced to gang culture when, after informing Benny that a boy called Canta threatened him on his last day of primary school, he is made to watch Benny and one of his side-kicks tie a rope with a bottle at each end around Canta's neck and use it to strangle him. And whilst this frightens the studious and introverted eleven-year-old John, it is only a matter of a few years before he is led in the same direction. As Murray highlights, John's secondary school turns out to be far from the safe haven of his primary school:

'Mullan's film figures school as an extension of, not an alternative to, nocturnal teenage battlegrounds. The schoolteachers' academic gowns and the Neds' leather trench coats are both forms of ceremonial costume that the wearers don in order to engage in acts of ritual violence, whether with belts in classrooms or blades in parks and housing schemes' (2015: 172).

Moreover, the experiences of finding himself denied entry into the 'top class' because of Benny's history of disruption and violence, and of being snubbed by the mother of a middle-class friend, prove to be a noxious combination. Hence, when a dejected John, on his way

home after the unpleasant encounter with his friend's mother, crosses the paths of the Young Car-Ds, and is recognised as Benny's brother and invited to join the gang, he does so readily, eventually driving him to wield various weapons in order to intimidate, threaten and maim not only rival gang members, but also his father and other people in the community. As journalist Sarah Boslaugh states, 'being Benny's younger brother ... provides John entrée into the world of teenage gangs, which offers a kind of comradeship otherwise missing in his life' (2011). And as journalist Ed Whitfield puts it, 'Benny is the archetypal alpha NED; a shitkicker, whose reputation has grown amongst urchins, allowing his beta brother to survive unmolested' (2010). Overall, then, Benny's main function is to pave John's way into gang culture, despite the best efforts of their mother to prevent history repeating itself. And correspondingly, Benny's sudden announcement that he is 'fucking off to London and then ... Spain', sandwiched, as it is, between a sequence in which John's headmaster agrees to allow John to return to school on a temporary basis, and the scene of John's first day back, suggests that John can be saved from further demise if Benny is no longer around. Indeed, Benny gone, John reverts to being an obedient student at school, turns on the Young Car-Ds when they try to help him after he finds himself vulnerable following an attack on a member of a rival gang, and fails to find it in himself to kill his hateful father in spite of his father's instruction to 'finish [him]'. In short, when Benny departs, John's rehabilitation begins.

If *Neds* (2010) is a cautionary tale of how an older brother's involvement in gang culture can lead a younger brother to follow suit to the detriment of both siblings, *Shank* (2010) turns such conventional moralising on its head by casting gang culture as a common means of survival on the streets of London in a dystopian 2015 Britain, depicting an older brother schooling his younger brothers in methods and techniques for not only getting by but actually staying alive. As outlined in the section on 'Ambivalent Trajectories', Rager is not only the leader of The Paper Chaserz, but also a virtual parent figure to Junior – their father unknown to them, and their mother having died when Junior was ten years old: 'Hope I grow up like Rager. He's the boss. I want to be boss one day too. ... He promised that he'd always look after me. He's always smart,' announces Junior in his opening voiceover. Moreover, although Rager is killed at the end of the first of three acts, the narrative is structured in such a way that, at the end of the second act, Junior starts to exert the same kind of authority that Rager had, and at the end of the final act, looks set to lead an amalgamation of The Paper Chaserz and another gang called The Slaughter Gurlz, becoming 'the boss' that he had hoped he would 'one day' be. In a nutshell, the older brother dies, but lives on through his younger brother.

In terms of scholarship on the role of brothers in British coming-of-age films, it is only *Small Faces* (1996) that appears to have received any sustained attention, with Petrie (2000) acknowledging some basic similarities and differences between Lex, Alan and Bobby, but more concerned with the portrayal of 1960s Glasgow gang culture, and Clandfield and Lloyd (2005) similarly exploring 'cultural and historical specificities that are crucial to the film's distinctive take on boyhood' (2005: 183) by honing in, specifically, on the relationship

between Lex and the other male characters, and the various urban spaces that they inhabit. For example, Clandfield and Lloyd argue that 'Lex's brothers represent two alternative traditional images of Glaswegian working-class masculinity: the volatile, territorial "Hard Man" ... and the detached, outward-looking thinker', and that the narrative 'suggests that they do not coexist easily' but 'are *not* mutually exclusive', with Lex 'exhibit[ing] throughout the film, in unpredictably varying ratios, both Bobby's rebelliousness and Alan's creativity' (2005: 184). Furthermore, Clandfield and Lloyd's examination considers the place of: Uncle Andrew (Ian McElhinney), the ebullient 'expatriate brother of the boys' long-dead father' (2005: 186), who ends up marrying the boys' mother; Charlie Sloan (Garry Sweeney), the leader of The Glen, who, on one level, 'embodies the convergence of the Hard Man and the intellectual' (2005: 187), but is also exposed as 'a dutiful boy on the threshold of a mundane adulthood' (2005: 196); and Malky Johnson (Kevin McKidd), the leader of the Garaside Tongs, who comes to pursue a vendetta against the MacLean boys, but is killed by Gorbals (Mark McConnochie), his younger step-brother.

To build upon Clandfield and Lloyd's analysis, it should be emphasised that Alan generally sets a good example to Lex. On the one hand, he may naively allow himself and Lex to be drawn into gang culture when Sloan shows a keen interest in his art and assigns him the position of 'war artist', persuading the brothers, for instance, to accompany the gang when they break into Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, where Alan indulges Sloan's self-aggrandisement (indeed, self-mythologisation) by painting Sloan's face onto one of the artworks. But on the other hand, such an act is 'relatively harmless, and perhaps even subversive of cultural and class boundaries' (Clandfield and Lloyd 2005: 187) and, at heart, Alan is an aspiring painter whose calm demeanour, political awareness, and generally outward-looking character make him a worthy role model. Indeed, as Petrie asserts, 'at ... points in the film, art seems the antithesis of the mindless violence perpetrated by the Glen and the Tongs, a creative means of escape and self-fulfilment' (Petrie 2000: 204), with Alan, pivotally, responsible for introducing Lex to the equally benign and cultured mentor figure of Fabio (David Walker), to whom Lex shows his sketches and learns of Perugia in Italy, from where Fabio's family hails.

In contrast, Bobby is an impressionable, semi-literate and volatile member of The Glen, whom Lex despairs of, mocks, and comes to hate for gloating after The Glen viciously attack Fabio. Furthermore, he is a brooding presence both at home and on the streets – an intimidating and irresponsible figure, as encapsulated by the image of him as a bulky silhouette against a blue sky and flaring sun, literally overshadowing his younger sibling as he hands him a brown paper bag containing a BB gun in order to supposedly compensate for deliberately killing his goldfish. It is little surprise, therefore, that Bobby ends up murdered at the behest of Malky after Lex divulges information about him in revenge for his approval of the assault upon Fabio. However, notably, there is a vulnerability beneath the bravado: at one point, he is comforted by his mother after waking from a nightmare in which he dreamt that he was dead; and when asked by Alan if he remembers how their father used to be

'always on at' him, he responds unconvincingly that their father apologised to him just before dying.

Thus if Alan's role in Lex's coming-of-age story is to be an enlightening and steadying influence, Bobby's, is to be a corrosive and divisive force, the best of whom it may be said that his mistakes inadvertently point his younger brother in a more positive direction. Significantly, 'in conventional closure-confirming fashion[,] ... Lex reports in voiceover ... a dream of his mother's, in which, not dead, [Bobby] goes north, becomes a fisherman, and attains acceptance' (Clandfield and Lloyd 2005: 198), becoming 'even popular' and known 'as an interesting and wise person.' But importantly, too, the accompanying image is of an isolated fishing boat out at sea in overcast conditions – a striking contrast to the optimism of the film's closing shot of Lex.

In addition, it is worth developing Clandfield and Lloyd's observations on Gorbals's relationship with Malky in order to illuminate further the nature of Lex's relationship with Alan and Bobby. As Clandfield and Lloyd observe, one scene sees Gorbals undergo a 'menacing interrogation' from Malky and 'his lieutenants' (2005: 195), and another shows him head-butted and kicked (2005: 197) by Malky. Hence it may be argued that, as with the two pairs of brothers in *Sixty Six* (2006), the tension between Lex and Bobby is paralleled by that between Gorbals and Malky. Importantly, however, whereas Lex has Alan's placidity to counterbalance Bobby's instability, the main male in Gorbals's life is the dangerous Malky:

Gorbals: It's just me, my step-brother, and two step-sisters. And wee Harry till he got put away.

Lex: No adults?

Gorbals: Nah. They lives their own lives next door.

Moreover, Malky's treatment of Gorbals is distinctly harsher than Bobby's treatment of Lex and, accordingly, Gorbals's revenge is bolder. Gorbals turns on the gas supply for a gas fire in a room in which Malky is sleeping, crucially, by using coins from one of Malky's pockets in the gas meter, and when Malky awakes and lights a cigarette, he is blown up. As Gorbals admits to Lex in a final exchange:

'I did it. So now I'm the killer, okay? I saved you, that whore Joanne, that idiot brother of yours. I saved you and you owe me. I murdered the fucker, and now I'm mental. ... They'll never guess, will they, Lex? It was just an accident, right? ... I'm the leader of the Tongs now.'

Indeed, the combination of the precedent set by 'wee Harry' and Gorbals's last words 'hints that ... he may be doomed to fall into a spiral of violence; ... his life, ... locked into the rules of gang power structures' (Clandfield and Lloyd 197-198) – the inverse of what he first tells Lex,

Lex: *You in the Tongs?*

Gorbals: *Nah. I'm a pacifist. Between you and me, the Tongs is a load of crap.*

Thus, whilst these younger brothers have much in common, their diverging paths are such that Gorbals's degradation through the absence of sensible guidance throws into relief Lex's relative good fortune in having a caring and level-headed mother and older brother.

Alongside loyal gang members Benny, Rager and Bobby, Ricky of *Bullet Boy* (2004) is depicted as having a more complex relationship with gang culture – determined, in fact, to extricate himself from its cyclical violence after a period in a Youth Offender Institution for stabbing someone, but drawn in one 'last time' by a friend (ironically) named Wisdom (Leon Black), leading to his murder. Consequently, Ricky is rendered a questionable influence upon his younger brother, Curtis, with whom he is shown to have a strong bond – especially in light of their father's absence. To begin with, Curtis hides in the boot of Wisdom's car when Wisdom goes to pick up Ricky from the Young Offender Institution, so keen is he to see his older brother after a period of absence. And on the way home, the siblings are shown having a heart to heart, with Ricky concerned but touched that Curtis has truanted in order to see him, and the two boys discussing whether Ricky's girlfriend has remained faithful. Indeed, it is soon made clear that Ricky is the most dominant male force in Curtis's life, serving as a role model, whether he likes it or not, as he oscillates between playing the part of big brother, and that of a father figure in their single-mother family – whilst also negotiating the process of 'becoming a man' himself. Furthermore, the sense of a family connection is enhanced by the physical similarity of the actors, which is especially striking in certain shots, such as when the two boys are shown sitting next to each other on their living room sofa or facing one another in their shared bedroom, and when Curtis's trip to a shop and Ricky's walk to a train station are intercut.

More specifically, although Ricky and Curtis have, on the surface, a playful relationship that is stereotypical of siblings, there are two deeper undercurrents. Firstly, in spite of Ricky's efforts to deter Curtis's interest in the gang culture that he himself is trying to escape, Curtis is obviously intrigued by his older brother's 'gangsta' lifestyle – pretending to be asleep as he eavesdrops on Ricky and Wisdom as they discuss the pros and cons of trying to earn a living by illicit means; again, pretending to be asleep whilst actually watching Ricky as he hides a gun in a drawer; examining the gun when Ricky leaves the room, which angers Ricky, but results in Curtis showing Ricky a better hiding place; and not only showing the gun to his best friend, Rio (Rio Tyson), but taking it out into the woods, where the boys play hide and seek, leading to Rio being hospitalised when Curtis accidentally shoots him. In fact, there is a discernible parallel between Curtis and Rio's relationship, and Ricky and Wisdom's relationship: the way that Wisdom bestows upon Ricky the gift of a gun by getting him to close his eyes and then pointing it in his face, mirrored by the way that Rio jokingly points the gun in Curtis's face; a dog that Wisdom shoots and Ricky then kicks into a canal, spotted later by Curtis and Rio, who throw stones at it; the pressure that Wisdom puts on Ricky to help him enact revenge upon a rival gang member, akin to Rio's taunts of 'Mummy's boy' when Curtis is initially reluctant to reveal the gun; and a conversation in which Ricky agrees to help Wisdom because he quite literally

owes his life to him, but then states that he wants out of the cycle of revenge ('You can't bring up no more shit about owe me this. Owe me nothing later, do you understand? That's it') echoed in Rio's words to Curtis in the hospital ('You owe me big time'). In addition, in the same way that Ricky and Curtis's physical resemblance stands out in certain shots, one particular sequence emphasises the similarity of the two friendships by overlaying a shot of Ricky and Wisdom sat side by side on a bus, with Curtis and Rio's dialogue from the next sequence, and then showing the two young boys sitting back-to-back in a park.

Secondly, Ricky also tries to fulfil the role of a father figure in Curtis's life – having a family day out of sorts by going ice-skating with his girlfriend and younger brother, and asserting his place in the family when he squares up to Leon (Curtis Walker), a Christian minister who may or may not be the boys' mother's boyfriend, warning him, 'Mind what you say in my house, yeah?', when Leon indicates that he is aware of Ricky's underground activities and then tries to tell him of the 'never-ending circle' of revenge that he himself was once caught up in and 'don't lead nowhere.' Hence it can be seen that whilst Ricky certainly attempts to set a good example to Curtis and, even, emulate a father figure, his efforts are compromised by his involvement with gangs and the result is bittersweet. As detailed in the section on 'Ambivalent Trajectories', Ricky's murder is framed as undoubtedly tragic in its futility, but also a learning experience for Curtis, who appears to go on to symbolically reject gang culture by throwing Ricky's gun into a canal. Their mother, Beverley (Clare Perkins), is shown to realise the dangers of having a son in a gang – at one point instructing Ricky to leave the family home in order to protect herself and Curtis from further police raids and other associated dangers – and her fears are eventually proven justified. In the end, Ricky's death is an arguably necessary sacrifice that paves the way for Curtis's (hopefully) brighter future, as highlighted by the juxtaposition of Ricky's murder, with a church sermon attended by Curtis and his mother.

Like Ricky, Rashid of *My Brother the Devil* (2012) is shown at a point in his development where he begins to question his surroundings and reflect upon his direction – coming to realise that a 'gangsta' lifestyle is not his only option, and thus extricating himself from a small-time drug ring, and opening himself up to art and politics when he meets ex-gang member turned professional photographer Sayyid, with whom he becomes intimate, despite already being in a relationship with a girl called Vanessa. Moreover, in the same way that Curtis looks up to Ricky, so Mo idolises Rashid, meaning that, once again, the choices of the older brother are shown to impact especially significantly upon the younger brother. And similarly, just as Ricky tries to steer Curtis away from gang culture, so Rashid praises Mo for his respectable GCSE results and chides him for hanging around in the flat from which Rashid's gang operate. Indeed, as writer and director Sally El Hosaini reveals in the DVD commentary, an image of Mo and Rashid revolving around each other preoccupied her from the early stages of production –

'Each of the brothers was a strand on the helix, and their lives twisted and spiralled around each other, kind of always connected but on separate paths, and that was an enormous blueprint when I

was writing and it was nice to carry it on in the edit' (Verve Pictures DVD extra 'Director's Commentary')

– and this is given literal form in one of the opening sequences in which Mo circles Rashid on his bike, whilst Rashid jabs playfully at him, and the two POVs are intercut in a way that 'is repeated at other points in the film deliberately': 'When telling the story, whoever we were with, we always needed to connect it to the other brother' (Editor Iain Kitching on the Verve Pictures DVD extra 'Director's Commentary'). Consonantly, as with the actors playing Curtis and Ricky, the physical similarity of the actors playing Mo and Rashid helps to convey the sense of a brotherly bond, particularly when they are framed side by side.

More precisely, as with Curtis and Ricky, Mo is clearly attracted to Rashid's lifestyle – trying to tag along with Rashid and his friends before being instructed to leave them to the 'big boys' stuff', his constant presence highlighted by the way in which his bright pink t-shirt is almost always seen in the frame; insisting that he does a drug run for Rashid, but ending up being mugged; playing with a flick knife with marked intensity; desperate for Rashid to listen to the rap that he has been composing; and eventually, although, in the end, temporarily brought into the network of Rashid's drug-dealing gang, and copying Rashid by putting some of the money that he earns into their mother's purse. Furthermore, so close to his older brother is he that he tactfully pretends to be asleep on the top bunk when Rashid and his girlfriend, Vanessa, have sex on the bottom bunk – even smiling at their pillow talk, as shown in an overhead shot that captures both Mo, and Rashid and Vanessa, as they lie in their respective beds. Nevertheless, there is much to suggest that Mo is still relatively immature, often pictured in the various children's playgrounds around the estate on which the family live – obviously too big for the climbing frames, etc., but with seemingly nowhere else to go – and at one point shown sitting up a tree by their block of flats. Analogously, the friendship and then boyfriend-girlfriend relationship of Mo and Aisha (Letitia Wright) is decidedly innocent in nature, with the couple seen frequently in the aforementioned playgrounds, doing little other than talking and listening to music. Thus Rashid's efforts to discourage Mo from following in his footsteps are framed as understandable, even if they leave Mo puzzled and, indeed, defiant. As borne out by the aforementioned mugging, Mo is perhaps not streetwise enough to be involved in the illegal drugs trade.

Pivotaly, if Mo is perplexed by Rashid's attempts to keep him away from the gang, his discovery that Rashid and Sayyid are in a relationship throws him into a pronounced state of confusion. Climbing up a fire escape ladder and peering into Sayyid's bedroom, where he sees someone's feet at the end of the bed and then Sayyid in just his underwear, Mo is shocked. He tries cocaine for the first time. He goes to tell Aisha and another friend about Rashid's secret, but instead tells them Rashid is mixed up in 'terrorist shit'. And then he 'outs' Rashid to Vanessa and some of the gang, leading to Rashid's attempted murder at the hands of one of the gang. However, as outlined in the section on 'Ambivalent Trajectories', although Mo leads the gang to Sayyid's home, he then suddenly intervenes, getting shot himself, but managing to protect Rashid. And finally, in spite of the boys'

parents' apparent inability to reconcile themselves with their son's bisexuality, resulting in Rashid's departure from the family home, the closing sequence – graced with sun flare and children playing in the background – sees Mo reassure Rashid that he is 'cool' with the situation, before Rashid then walks away and Mo watches after him, eyes brimming with tears.

It can be seen, then, that a notable number of contemporary British coming-of-age films with male protagonists position the character of an older brother as intrinsic to the development of his younger brother, whether the younger brother is the protagonist, or whether both brothers are protagonists. Sometimes the older brother operates as a destructive force – his sense of sibling rivalry and/or involvement with a criminal subculture shown to impact negatively upon his younger brother – and, indeed, it may be argued that in the same way that some films of a social realist bent utilise a father-son relationship as a vehicle for registering a 'crisis of masculinity' brought about by the decline of the manufacturing sector, so some of the films featuring two brothers speak to another kind of 'crisis of masculinity', namely, that of adolescent males growing up in an environment in which machismo and criminal activity constitute the dominant response to (perhaps a form of compensation for) socio-economic disadvantage. However, in some cases, the older brother may be drawn as more helpful than not – shown to support his younger brother in various ways, such as encouraging or actively enabling him in his endeavours, trying to provide moral guidance or set a good example, or attempting to fulfil the role of a father figure in a single-mother family. Either way, the behaviour of the older brother is typically situated as an important factor in the identity formation of his younger brother, offering a version of masculinity that may be imitated or rejected. Overall, therefore, the figure of the older brother is a common and significant narrative device in the boy-centred contemporary British coming-of-age film, and an examination of his function supplements the 'systematic exploration of masculinities' (Powrie, Babington and Davies 2004: 1) in Film Studies, which, as outlined earlier, began to take root in the late 1980s and has thus far shown a preoccupation with the place of fathers and father figures.

Conclusion

In conclusion, boy-centred contemporary British coming-of-age films with male protagonists are inclined towards both generic hybridity, and thematic, formal and stylistic diversity, but marked by clear lines of continuity in the form of the repeated appearance of certain issues, character types, plot devices, and narrative arcs. Naturally, any one of the strands discussed in this chapter could be explored further, and manifold features are, for reasons of space, not discussed here, such as patterns in the portrayals of middle-class and upper-class protagonists, and the role of mothers or mother figures. Nevertheless, it is hoped that in delineating some of the dominant traits of the body of the work in question,

this chapter provides a valuable insight into the coming-of-age genre and its specific manifestation within contemporary British cinema.

Chapter Four

Girlhood in Contemporary British Cinema

Introduction

As stated in the previous chapter, contemporary British coming-of-age films revolving around adolescent female protagonists are outnumbered by those centring upon the adolescent male experience by about 2:1, echoing the general shape of the European *Bildungsroman*, and indicating that there is room for greater female representation within British cinema. Indeed, as also detailed in the previous chapter, even those films with mixed gender ensemble casts demonstrate a bias towards male representation. Nevertheless, the 2000s and 2010s (thus far) have brought a significant increase in the number of films concerning female adolescence – about double that of the 1980s and 1990s – and as with the films dealing in male adolescence, there is both generic hybridity, and thematic, formal and stylistic diversity, with possible subcategories including: the biopic e.g. *Elizabeth* (1998), *Becoming Jane* (2007), *Belle* (2014) and *Testament of Youth* (2014); films about the care system e.g. *R.H.I.N.O.* (1983) and *The Unloved* (2009); comedy e.g. *St Trinian's* (2007) and *St Trinian's 2* (2009); comedy drama ('dramedy') e.g. *Those Glory Glory Days* (1983), *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1987), *Wish You Were Here* (1987) and *Anita and Me* (2002); comedy horror e.g. *Tormented* (2009); the crime thriller e.g. *The Hole* (2001), *Morvern Callar* (2002), *London to Brighton* (2006) and *4.3.2.1.* (2010); evocations of the 1960s (the 'retro' film) e.g. *Those Glory Glory Days* (1983), *An Education* (2009), *Ginger and Rosa* (2012) and *The Falling* (2015); heritage film e.g. *A Room with a View* (1985); the hood film e.g. *Sket* (2011); films with minority ethnic protagonists e.g. *Burning an Illusion* (1981), *R.H.I.N.O.* (1983), *Babymother* (1998), *East is East* (1999), *Anita and Me* (2002), *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), *Kidulthood* (2006) and *Belle* (2014) – which are examined in Chapter Five; the musical e.g. *Babymother* (1998); films about prostitution e.g. *Stella Does Tricks* (1996) and *London to Brighton* (2006); the queer film e.g. *My Summer of Love* (2004); romantic comedy e.g. *An Awfully Big Adventure* (1995), *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), *Emma* (1996), *Virtual Sexuality* (1999), *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) and *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* (2008); romantic drama e.g. *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985), *The Land Girls* (1998), *I Capture the Castle* (2003), *Atonement* (2007) and *Becoming Jane* (2007); the school film e.g. *The Hole* (2001), *St Trinian's* (2007), *Wild Child* (2008), *St Trinian's 2* (2009) and *The Falling* (2015); films of a social realist bent⁶⁴ e.g. *R.H.I.N.O.* (1983), *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985), *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1987), *Stella Does Tricks* (1996), *Babymother* (1998), *A Way of Life* (2004), *Top Spot* (2004),

⁶⁴ As detailed in the previous chapter, films that may be said to lie within or, at least, show the influence of British cinema's tradition of social realism are formally and stylistically varied but: (a) united by their focus upon working-class lives and settings; and (b) typically underpinned by an impulse to expose structural inequities, with the aim of inspiring socio-political reform.

Kidulthood (2006), *London to Brighton* (2006), *Fish Tank* (2009) and *I Am Nasrine* (2012); and the sports film e.g. *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) and *Chalet Girl* (2011). Furthermore, some of the films at hand may be said to be exemplary of the coming-of-age genre, in as much that they foreground the adolescent growth of their protagonist or protagonists above all else e.g. *Me Without You* (2001), *Anita and Me* (2002), *I Capture the Castle* (2003), *My Summer of Love* (2004), *Becoming Jane* (2007), *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* (2008), *An Education* (2009), *Fish Tank* (2009) and *Albatross* (2011).

Pertinently, James Leggott observes that ‘the masculinist bias of much British social realist cinema has been challenged [– between 1997 and 2008 –] by a proliferation of films centring upon female characters, very often from the perspective of a female writer or director’ (2008: 72), making particular reference to Lynne Ramsay, who co-wrote and directed *Morvern Callar* (2002), and Andrea Arnold, who wrote and directed *Fish Tank* (2009). And similarly, John Fitzgerald’s study of British cinema from 1999–2009 outlines ‘The New Realism – Girls on Top’, discussing, amongst other titles, *A Way of Life* (2004), which was written and directed by Amma Asante (2010: 73–92). Indeed, six other films sit within this trend – *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1987) written by Andrea Dunbar; *Stella Does Tricks* (1996) written by A.L. Kennedy and directed by Coky Giedroyc; *Top Spot* (2004) written and directed by Tracey Emin; *Brick Lane* (2007), based upon Monica Ali’s novel of the same name (2003), co-written by Monica Ali, Laura Jones and Abi Morgan, and directed by Sarah Gavron; *The Unloved* (2009), co-written and directed by Samantha Morton; and *I Am Nasrine* (2012) written and directed by Tina Gharvari. Moreover, it is essential to recognise the significance of this development in the light of *A Taste of Honey* (1961), which was written by Shelagh Delaney, who adapted her play of the same name (1958), and stands out as a seminal exploration of working-class female adolescence within the otherwise male-centric representations of youth that dominated the British New Wave (1956–1963) – interpreted by John Hill, for example, as pitting domesticity against sexuality (1986: 166), but seen by Terry Lovell as primarily about ‘outsiders’ (1990: 372), namely, seventeen-year-old protagonist, Josephine/Jo (Rita Tushingham), who becomes an inexperienced single mother, just like her own mother, and her two companions, black sailor Jimmy (Paul Danquah) and gay art student Geoff (Murray Melvin), all of whom live ‘on the margins of working-class culture and community’ (1990: 374).

Further to this, falling outside of the social realist tradition, but also written and/or directed by women, are: *Those Glory Glory Days* (1983) written by Julie Welch; *A Room with a View* (1985), based upon E.M. Forster’s novel of the same name (1908) and written by Ruth Praver Jhabvala; *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), based upon Jane Austen’s novel of the same name (1811) and written by Emma Thompson; *Under the Skin* (1997) written and directed by Carine Adler; *Virtual Sexuality* (1999), co-written by Chloë Rayban, who adapted it from her novel *Virtual Sexual Reality* (1994); *Babymother* (1998), co-written by Vivienne Howard; *Me Without You* (2001), co-written and directed by Sandra Goldbacher; *The Hole* (2001), co-written by Caroline Ip; *Anita and Me* (2002) written by Meera Syal; *Bend It Like*

Beckham (2002), co-written and directed by Gurinder Chadha; *I Capture the Castle* (2003), based upon Dodie Smith's novel of the same name (1948) and written by Heidi Thomas; *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), based upon Austen's novel of the same name (1813) and written by Deborah Moggach, with input from Emma Thompson; *Becoming Jane* (2007), co-written by Sarah Williams; *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* (2008), based upon Louise Rennison's novel, *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging* (1999), and written and directed by Gurinder Chadha; *Wild Child* (2008) written by Lucy Dahl; *An Education* (2009), based upon an autobiographical essay of the same name by journalist Lynn Barber (2003) and directed by Lone Sherfig; *Albatross* (2011) written by Tamzin Rafn; *Wuthering Heights* (2011), based upon Emily Brontë's novel of the same name (1847), co-written by Andrea Arnold and Olivia Hetreed, and directed by Andrea Arnold; *Ginger and Rosa* (2012) written and directed by Sally Potter; *Belle* (2014) written by Misan Sagay and directed by Amma Asante; *Testament of Youth* (2014), based upon Vera Brittain's memoir of the same name (1933) and written by Juliette Towhidi; and *The Falling* (2015) written and directed by Carol Morley. Indeed, the Directors UK report, *Cut Out of the Picture* (Follows 2016), which 'examines ... how female filmmakers are faring in the industry at large [by] [l]ooking at all 2591 films made in the UK between 2005 and 2014', may be correct to conclude that 'female filmmakers are being shortchanged by the industry' (Baughan 2016), but it can be seen, too, that the coming-of-age film focusing upon the adolescent female experience has proved a popular vehicle for female screenwriters and directors to make their mark.

Common Configurations

Like contemporary British coming-of-age films portraying male adolescence, contemporary British coming-of-age films depicting female adolescence typically follow an individual and, as with the male protagonists, the female protagonists range from those who are not quite yet teenagers, to those who in the first half of their twenties – with a bias, in the case of the females, towards those in their mid- or late adolescence. For instance, in terms of early adolescence: Lucy (Molly Windsor) of *The Unloved* (2009) and Emily 'Skunk' Cunningham (Eloise Laurence) of *Broken* (2012) are eleven years old; Julia Herrick (Zoë Nathenson) of *Those Glory Glory Days* (1983) is thirteen years old; and Georgia Nicholson (Georgia Groome) of *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* (2008) is fourteen years old. Meanwhile, when it comes to middle adolescence: Stella (Kelly Macdonald) of *Stella Does Tricks* (1996), Annabelle Lealla Fritton (Talulah Riley) of *St Trinian's* (2007), and Mia Williams (Katie Jarvis) of *Fish Tank* (2009) are fifteen years old; Lynda Mansell (Emily Lloyd) of *Wish You Were Here* (1987), Stella Bradshaw (Georgina Cates) of *An Awfully Big Adventure* (1995), Poppy Moore (Emma Roberts) of *Wild Child* (2008), and Kayla (Aimee Kelly) of *Sket* (2011) are sixteen years old; Jenny Mellor (Carey Mulligan) of *An Education* (2009) turns seventeen; Justine (Laura Fraser) of *Virtual Sexuality* (1999), Cassandra Mortmain (Romola Garai) of *I Capture the Castle* (2003), Annabelle Lealla Fritton (Talulah Riley) of *St Trinian's 2* (2009),

and Tessa Scott (Dakota Fanning) of *Now Is Good* (2012) are seventeen years old; Elizabeth/Liz Dunn (Thora Birch) of *The Hole* (2001) and Justine Fielding (Tuppence Middleton) of *Tormented* (2009) appear to be sixth-formers, making them between sixteen and eighteen years of age; and Leigh-Anne Williams (Stephanie James) of *A Way of Life* (2004) is probably eighteen years old, since the girl in the criminal case that inspired Asante was that age, as was James at the time of filming (Sherwin 2003). Lastly, with regard to late adolescence: Iris (Samantha Morton) of *Under the Skin* (1997) and Kim Matthews (Felicity Jones) of *Chalet Girl* (2011) are nineteen years old; Emma Woodhouse (Gwyneth Paltrow) of *Emma* (1996), Elizabeth Bennet (Keira Knightley) of *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), and Jane Austen (Anna Hathaway) of *Becoming Jane* (2007) are twenty years old – forming an unofficial Austen-based trio; Vera Brittain (Alicia Vikander) of *Testament of Youth* (2014) is shown between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-five; Lucy Honeychurch (Helena Bonham Carter) of *A Room with a View* (1985) looks to be in her early twenties; and Elizabeth I (Cate Blanchett) of *Elizabeth* (1998) is twenty-five years old.

In addition, a number of these titles place their protagonist within a group of adolescent characters who are drawn as not only peers, but important figures in her development. Julia of *Those Glory Glory Days* (1983) and Georgia of *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* (2008) are pictured as part of a quartet of close female school friends of the same age. Liz of *The Hole* (2001) is shown in a situation involving four other pupils from her school year – three males and one female. Leigh-Anne of *A Way of Life* (2004) is positioned as the leader of a group consisting of three adolescent males, one of whom is her younger brother. Talulah of *St Trinian's* (2007) and *St Trinian's 2* (2009) is figured within a large group of adolescent female pupils attending the eponymous school. The way in which Justine of *Tormented* (2009) is drawn into a school clique consisting of three females and three males is intrinsic to her journey. The story of Kayla of *Sket* (2011) is bound up with that of her older sister and a leader of a girl gang. And the evolution of Vera of *Testament of Youth* (2014) is entwined with that of her brother and two of his male friends, one of whom she becomes engaged to.

Further to this, a key variation upon those films revolving around an individual are those focusing upon a pair – although, in contrast to their male equivalents, who range from early to late adolescence, the females are more often than not in their mid- or late adolescence. For example, six films pair two characters of the same age: Rita (Siobhan Finneran) and Sue (Michelle Holmes) of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1987), and Abigail Mortimer (Florence Pugh) and Lydia Lamont (Maisie Williams) of *The Falling* (2015) are sixteen years old; Beth Fischer (Felicity Jones) and Emilia Conan Doyle (Jessica Brown Findlay) of *Albatross* (2011), and Ginger (Elle Fanning) and Rosa (Alice Englert) of *Ginger and Rosa* (2012) are seventeen years old; in *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985), Elaine Spencer (Alexandra Pigg) is twenty-two years old and Theresa King (Margi Clarke) looks to be about the same age; and *Me Without You* (2001) follows Holly (Ella Jones and Michelle Williams) and Marina (Anna Popplewell and Anna Friel) from early adolescence (1973) to mid-adolescence (1978) to late

adolescence (1982), through to adulthood (1989 and 2001). Similarly, two films cross the lives of two characters at different stages of adolescence: *London to Brighton* (2006), which brings together eleven-year-old Joanne (Georgia Groome), and Kelly (Lorraine Stanley), who looks to be in her early twenties; and *Atonement* (2007), which interweaves the lives of sisters Briony Tallis and Cecilia Tallis, shown, respectively, at thirteen (Saoirse Ronan) and then eighteen years old (Romola Garai), and at eighteen and then twenty-three years old (Keira Knightley). Likewise, although the adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) turns Elinor Dashwood (Emma Thompson) from a nineteen year old into a twenty-seven year old, due to Thompson being thirty-six years old at the time of filming, her experiences are still represented as befitting of someone in their late adolescence, whilst her younger sister, Marianne Dashwood (Kate Winslet), remains, as Austen intended, a sixteen year old.

Furthermore, if duos are an important innovation, so, too, are trios and ensemble casts – on one side, *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988) and *The Land Girls* (1998), and on the other side, *Human Traffic* (1999), *Top Spot* (2004), *Kidulthood* (2006), *Summer Scars* (2007) and *Better Things* (2008). More precisely, in *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988), Eileen (Angela Walsh) and Maisie (Lorraine Ashbourne), who look to be in their early twenties, are two of three siblings of about the same age, and in *The Land Girls* (1998), Stella (Catherine McCormack) is twenty-one years old, Prudence/Prue (Anna Friel) is twenty-two years old, and Agapanthas/Ag (Rachel Weisz) is, at twenty-six, an adult, but in some ways less experienced than the other two. Meanwhile, when it comes to the ensemble casts, these range from all-female adolescent protagonists, to mixed gender adolescent protagonists, to mixed gender adolescent and elderly protagonists. In *Top Spot* (2004), there are six female protagonists in their mid-adolescence – Elizabeth (Elizabeth Crawford), Frances (Frankie Williams), Helen (Helen Laker), Katie (Katie Foster Barnes), Kieri (Kieri Kennedy) and Laura (Laura Curnick). In *Kidulthood* (2006), fifteen years olds Alisa (Red Madrell), Becky (Jaime Winstone) and Claire (Madeleine Fairley) are three of seven adolescent protagonists. In *Summer Scars* (2007), fourteen-year-old Leanne (Amy Harvey) is the only girl in a group of six adolescent protagonists. In *Human Traffic* (1999), Lulu (Lorraine Pilkington) and Nina (Nicola Reynolds), who appear to be in their early twenties, are two of five adolescent protagonists. And in *Better Things* (2008), Gail Wilson (Rachel McIntyre), Julie (Katie Samuels), Rachel (Megan Palmer) and Sarah (Tara Ballard), who seem to be in their mid-adolescence, are part of a cast of nine adolescent and five elderly protagonists.

Existing Scholarship

Existing scholarship on contemporary British coming-of-age films with female protagonists is not extensive. About a quarter of the films have received varying degrees of attention, but there has not yet been any attempt to discuss the overarching dynamics of the body of work in question in terms of, for instance, common themes, dominant character types, popular storylines, prominent formal and stylistic features, important

screenwriters/directors/producers, notable actresses, and box office successes and failures. As cited in Chapter Five, there are publications pertaining to about two-thirds of the films centring upon minority ethnic female protagonists, namely, *Burning an Illusion* (1981), *Babymother* (1998), *East is East* (1999), *Anita and Me* (2002), *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), *Kidulthood* (2006), *Brick Lane* (2007) and *Belle* (2012). Yet when it comes to those films with white British female protagonists, there are proportionately fewer publications, and these tend to conflate girlhood with womanhood, meaning that any potential exploration of the treatment of female coming of age is usually sidelined in favour of an examination of the representation of 'women's issues', which are not always directly applicable to those protagonists who are going through puberty, still living with parents or guardians, attending school, and so on. For example, Justine King (1996) surveys *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985) and *Wish You Were Here* (1987); and Hill (1999), *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985) and *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1987). Charlotte Brunson (2000) considers *Stella Does Tricks* (1996) and *Under the Skin* (1997); and Fitzgerald (2010), *A Way of Life* (2004). Emily Cuming (2013), Pam Hirsch (2014), Lucy Bolton (2016) and Amber Jacobs (2016) analyse *Fish Tank* (2009). Mayer's chapter entitled 'I Have No Country: British cinema as a Runaway Girl' (2016: 79) interweaves ideas about *Under the Skin* (1997), *Fish Tank* (2009), *The Unloved* (2009) and *Ginger and Rosa* (2012). And Phil Powrie makes brief reference to *Those Glory Glory Days* (1983), *Wish You Were Here* (1987) and *An Awfully Big Adventure* (1995) as examples of a 'sub-genre' (2000: 317) of 'rite of passage films' which he calls 'alternative heritage' (2000: 316). Overall, however, coverage is relatively sparse.

Nevertheless, as indicated by the title of Mayer's chapter, it is important to note the emergence of one standout theme across the aforementioned scholarship, which is that of escape, as portrayed in a variety of forms, but often – as is the case for some of the working-class male protagonists – from a constrictive home life in a working-class setting. For instance, King frames *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985) and *Wish You Were Here* (1987) within a discussion of five incarnations of the contemporary British 'woman's film' that are, 'with only one exception, the products of all-male scriptwriting and directing collaborations', but 'nonetheless occup[y] much of the terrain traditionally held by "women's cinema"' (1996: 216) – drawing attention to, in particular, the trope of liminality and, especially, the 'all-pervasive and recurring motif of escape' (1996: 219), specifically, by comparing the trajectories of Elaine, Teresa and Lynda, with those of Susan/Rita White (Julie Walters) of *Educating Rita* (1983), Anita (Alyson Spire), Catherine (Jane Evers), Diane (Pauline Yates), Doreen (Paula Jacobs), Fran (Julie Walters), Joan (Maureen O'Brien), Judith (Jane Wood) and Lucy (Janet Henfrey) of *She'll be Wearing Pink Pyjamas* (1985), and Shirley Valentine-Bradshaw (Pauline Collins) of *Shirley Valentine* (1989). More precisely, King argues that Elaine and Lynda's respective journeys are tantamount to 'a rite of passage which simply trades one familial role (as daughters) with those of adult femininity (as wives and/or mothers)' (1996: 228), and that, therefore, the narratives are somewhat conservative or, at the very least, illustrative of the kinds of roles that females stereotypically move between.

That is, whilst *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985) sees Elaine depart Liverpool to live in the Soviet Union, the move ‘takes her *towards* her sexually allotted roles (as she tells the pompous Home Office official who attempts to deter her from her politically embarrassing plans, she *wants* to be a wife and mother)’ (King 1996: 225). Indeed, Teresa may appear to be the more circumscribed of the two – ‘her life ... a vicious circle whereby she continues to do a job she loathes in order to earn enough money to enjoy herself, and spends her nights desperately chasing a good time to make the prospect of another day in the chicken factory tolerable’ (King 1996: 226) – but it may also be said that Elaine’s decision to follow Peter (Peter Firth) to his home country merely transports her to a different kind of domesticity. Similarly, although the closing sequence of *Wish You Were Here* (1987) shows Lynda dressed in a striking yellow dress, proudly pushing a pram containing her illegitimate child, and ‘defiantly meeting the half-lecherous, half-censorious gazes of the men with whom she once worked’, the final image of her ‘standing outside the patriarchal home smiling delightedly at the baby she proudly holds aloft’ implies that she has ended up in ‘arguably the most forcibly prescribed feminine role of them all: motherhood’ (King 1996: 222-223).

Analogously, Hill’s work on British cinema of the same decade situates *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985) and *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1987) within a growth of films focusing upon the lives of working-class females (1999: 174), pointing, like King, to the theme of escape and the possibility or impossibility of genuinely progressive female agency – particularly within the context of socio-economic disenfranchisement – and reflecting, too, upon each film’s stylistic approach to such subject matter. For example, with regard to *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985), Hill asserts that Elaine’s success in securing an invitation and plane ticket to leave Liverpool in order to be with her love in the Soviet Union is undercut by the film’s concluding sense of pathos, which is ‘generated by ... an identification with the predicament of Teresa’, ‘a recognition that the escape route which ... Elaine has taken is not one that is generally available’ (1999: 181) – as emphasised by the film’s mixture of social realist elements and the ‘self-conscious appropriation of the conventions of Hollywood romance and cinematic fantasy’ (1999: 179) – and the way in which ‘the separation of the two women ... is registered as a significant loss for both characters’ (1999: 181). Likewise, Hill maintains of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1987) that whilst the girls, on one level, experience a process of liberation, fleeing ‘the oppressiveness of their ... [respective] domestic backgrounds’ and, crucially, doing so in a way ‘that preserves the relationship between them’ and puts them in relative material comfort, they end up ‘in a position of apparently accepting Bob’s shortcomings and his desire to have them both’, meaning that he is as good as ‘reward[ed] ... for his illegal seduction of under-age schoolgirls’ (1999: 182). In short, the girls are compromised, and importantly, too, the film’s ‘detached comic gaze’ (1999: 183), achieved by an ‘observational (or “documentary realist”) style’ camera, arguably discourages moral censure on the part of the audience.

By way of contrast, Brunsdon inadvertently highlights two other types of escape – this time, in British cinema of the following decade, and with a particular eye on *Stella Does*

Tricks (1996) and *Under the Skin* (1997), which she discusses under the heading 'Desperate Girls', and groups with a handful of other films that seem especially concerned with 'the question of how to "do" femininity' (2000: 167). In comparison with the mental shift and spatial dislocation of Elaine, and the sexual experimentation and domestic relocation of Rita and Sue, *Stella Does Tricks* (1996) and *Under the Skin* (1997) are more concerned with the relationship between explorations of the body and psychological issues, than literal journeys – Stella's and Iris's movements from one place to another, of minimal significance, but the former's prostitution and the latter's penchant for masturbation and multiple casual sexual encounters, and the way in which these activities are inextricably bound up with each girl's troubled mental state, pushed to the fore. Stella is haunted by memories of sexual abuse at the hands of her father when she was a child, and characterised, above all else, by her imagination – her 'ability to fantasise' (Petrie 2000: 205) – which she employs as a coping mechanism when she is with customers: 'Let me tell you, sisters, I can picture any fucking scene, I have the technology, that's my thing,' she proclaims to her co-workers. Indeed, in the final sequence, she takes 'a fatal overdose [and] the film ends with a vision of [her] on stage in a club recounting the story of her life and of her dreams to the audience' (Petrie 2000: 205). Meanwhile, although Iris denies it to her boyfriend – 'You think this is something to do with Mum, don't you? Well, it isn't, it isn't' – her promiscuity in the wake of her mother's death is portrayed not as 'pleasure, but ... as a grief-torn attempt at both connection and obliteration, ... as the expression of pain and anger' (Brunsdon 2000: 173). Ergo, with regard to Stella's handling of her situation, and Iris's response to her circumstances, perhaps 'escapism' is a more apt descriptor than 'escape'.

Lastly, when it comes to the 2000s, the title that has received the most attention is *Fish Tank* (2009) and, again, the theme of escape features prominently, with one question emerging as an issue of particular interest: whether or not the Essex council estate on which Mia lives is figured as a hostile place from which she does well to eventually depart⁶⁵. For instance, Hirsch highlights some of the basic ways in which Mia tries to 'resist or subvert socially imposed restrictions' (2014: 470), whilst Mayer posits that '[b]y seeing the mute suffering of the horse ... Mia comes to an understanding of herself as oppressed, but also

⁶⁵ Whilst my Master's dissertation (2012) does not pose this specific question, it does hone in on Mia's environment and her movements within it. Different forms of escape are identified, such as: retreating to either her bedroom, her sister's bedroom, or her mother's bedroom; withdrawing to an untenanted flat to drink alcohol and practise dancing hip hop; watching hip-hop dance videos in an Internet café; enjoying the countryside when her mother's boyfriend, Connor O'Reilly (Michael Fassbender), drives her and her mother and sister to a nearby beauty spot; flirting and developing a sexual relationship with Connor; and – finally – packing up her belongings, dancing to Nas's *Life's a Bitch* (1994) with her mother and sister, and driving off to live in Wales with her Traveller friend/boyfriend, as her sister runs after the car and a heart-shaped heart balloon floats up into the sky. Moreover, anthropological work on rites of passage (van Gennep 2001, Turner 1995, Lincoln 1981, and Grimes 2000) is utilised to illuminate the relationship between Mia's adolescent growth and the range of spaces and places that she is shown to inhabit and explore, with an emphasis upon the differences in her behaviour when she is on and around the estate, and when she is in the countryside.

able to resist – for the animal, if not for herself’ (2016: 39). And in the same vein, Cuming uses journalist Lynsey Hanley’s account of social housing in twentieth-century Britain, *Estates: An Intimate History* (2007), as a springboard for ‘explor[ing] the landscape of the British housing estate as a social and aesthetic backdrop and environment in female coming-of-age narratives’, asserting that the ‘narrative arcs’ of *Brick Lane* (2007) and *Fish Tank* (2009) ‘uphold individualist principles of escape and self-sufficiency as the only possible frameworks for selfhood’ (2013: 328) – with Mia apparently trapped in a place that is positively dangerous (2013: 337-338), and a ‘rejection of the spatial parameters of the estate ... the only defiance she has left to offer’ (2013: 338). By contrast, Bolton asserts that *Fish Tank* (2009) is not so much concerned with illustrating the kinds of socio-economic conditions that might be said to necessitate escape, as the condition of being white British, working-class, female, fifteen-year-old Mia:

‘Spending time with Mia in *Fish Tank* is to experience the uncertainties, ambiguities, and disappointments of a particular 15-year-old girl in modern Britain. ... The film does not take a judgmental or proselytizing stance on the estate or the people that live there, but portrays fun, humour, anger, ugliness, and beauty in places that might, in another filmmaker’s hands, have been bleak [and] gray. ... In *Fish Tank*, there is no star persona, moralizing message, overt political agenda, or pop-culture burden. *Fish Tank* articulates what it is to be Mia: not a cliché of “broken Britain,” or a cinematic device for conveying the supposed concerns of a generation, but of one 15-year-old girl facing both constraints and possibilities within the confines of her class, age, and gender’ (2016: 83).

The Girl and the Man

Instead of pursuing the general theme of escape, this thesis turns its attention to another line of continuity that runs through girl-centred contemporary British coming-of-age films – the frequent depiction of sexual encounters and relationships between girls and (sometimes significantly older, sometimes married) men, which is arguably the female equivalent of the prominent portrayal of brothers, as discussed in the previous chapter, pertaining to about a quarter of the films at hand: *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1987), *Wish You Were Here* (1987), *An Awfully Big Adventure* (1995), *Stella Does Tricks* (1996), *Me Without You* (2001), *Top Spot* (2004), *Kidulthood* (2006), *London to Brighton* (2006), *Atonement* (2007), *Summer Scars* (2007), *An Education* (2009), *Fish Tank* (2009), *The Scouting Book for Boys* (2009), *The Unloved* (2009), *Albatross* (2011) and *Ginger and Rosa* (2012). Furthermore, this configuration of the girl and the man may be said to mark out contemporary British cinema’s treatment of adolescent female sexuality from its characterisation of adolescent male sexuality, in as much that the latter contains only a handful of examples of such a dynamic between a boy and a woman – pivotally, in *Driving Lessons* (2006); centrally, in *Hallam Foe* (2007); and as an aside in *Hunky Dory* (2012). More specifically, as shall be shown, some of the girls’ relationships with men are – in an echo of the aforementioned scholarship – framed as tantamount to a type of escape or attempted escape on the part of the girl. And in other cases, the relationship essentially consists of

sexually abusive and exploitative behaviour on the part of the man, casting the girl in the role of victim. Furthermore, class emerges as a decisive factor, with escapist relationships generally the preserve of the middle-class girls, and the working-class girls far more likely to be preyed upon by men seeking to use them sexually. However, importantly, both working-class and middle-class girls are pictured in relationships with deceitful men and, in some cases, the figure of the working-class girl exacts revenge upon the figure of the sexually abusive and exploitative and/or deceitful man, according her with a distinctive kind of agency.

Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

Five films of a social realist persuasion engage with the socio-cultural phenomenon of the sexual abuse and exploitation of girls at the hands of men, illustrating, between them, incidents of unwanted sexual attention, indecent exposure, sexual blackmail, incest, rape, and prostitution, which are perpetrated, in the main, by adult male characters upon adolescent female characters. In *Stella Does Tricks* (1996), Stella is a former victim of childhood sexual abuse who has become a teenage prostitute but wants a more normal existence. In *Top Spot* (2004), the audience learns that Katie and Frances have been sexually assaulted by men, Elizabeth has had sex with a number of men, and – in a slight variation – Kieri and Laura are being manipulated into sexual activity by an unspecified woman whose house they visit regularly. In *London to Brighton* (2006), Kelly is a prostitute who helps Joanne get both into and out of prostitution. In *Summer Scars* (2007), Leanne is sexually molested by a mentally ill man whom she and her friends have the misfortune of encountering one day. And in *The Unloved* (2009), Lucy's time in a children's home involves sharing a room with an older girl who is taken advantage of sexually by a male member of staff.

Notably, the narrative of *Stella Does Tricks* (1996) has some basis in reality, as indicated by a final intertitle stating 'With thanks to the girls we met in Glasgow, Manchester and London whose lives inspired the making of this film', and similarly, *Top Spot* (2004) and *The Unloved* (2009) offer markedly personal takes on the socio-cultural phenomenon in question, in as much that they are semi-autobiographical and underpinned by educative aims. More specifically, the DVD cover for *Top Spot* (2004) posits that it 'marks a beautiful new chapter in [Emin's] rich body of autobiographical work' (Tartan Video 2006), and the accompanying literature asserts of her intentions:

'For all the controversy on its release, her project is, in many ways, very traditional: a warning to young women about the dangers of sexual exploitation. She has said of the film, "I wanted to be a good role model. I wanted to show adolescent girls that there are better ways out than drugs or being promiscuous – like maybe get a camera, make a film." A final scene of the film-maker climbing into a helicopter and leaving Margate behind will be interpreted by critics as more megalomania on Emin's part – a flash cameo from an incurable attention seeker – but it can be read as something more

triumphant, an invitation to those going through the universal miseries of teendom to escape into creativity, self-expression and success' (Spencer for Tartan Video 2006).

Meanwhile, the closing intertitles of *The Unloved* (2009) inform the audience that the UK has 71,476 children in care and 36,405 on the 'at risk' register, suggesting that Lucy and Lauren's stories are representative of the experiences of many vulnerable young people. And Morton has divulged, in an interview with journalist Simon Hattenstone, that the film is 'a censored version' of her youth, and that she "'wanted to make a film that someone from the age of 13 could watch and get, and it would change them'", which is why it was imperative that it was shown on television before its cinema release (2009).

Further to this, it is worth noting that the films at hand have appeared in a period during which the socio-cultural phenomenon of the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people has become less of a taboo subject and more of a popular talking point within the context of the British media. Hitherto, there had been a degree of reportage, but recent years have seen a tangible shift towards greater coverage:

'The sexual abuse of children, both contemporary and historic, has become one of the defining issues of our times. Barely a day goes by without media reports of the arrest or conviction of alleged offenders, or of the latest details of official enquiries into the problem, in Britain and abroad. The internet swirls with rumours of conspiracies and cover-ups. If the attention given to child sexual abuse is at unprecedented levels, it has been building intermittently for several decades. The emergence of the paedophile⁶⁶ as a specific and potent social menace can be dated quite precisely to the mid-1970s, and by the 1980s, the issue was receiving considerable media attention, both in newspapers and in television programmes such as BBC's *Childwatch* (1986)' (Bingham and Settle 2015).

Indeed, although sensationalism is rife and serious investigative journalism, 'rare' (Bingham and Settle 2015), the picture is changing. For example, whilst in 1983 'the tabloids dedicated considerable space and resources to reporting a gruesome incident in Brighton where a six-year-old boy was kidnapped and sexually terrorised', in 2000, the 'name and shame' campaign launched by the *News of the World*, in the wake of the murder of eight-year-old Sarah Payne by a registered child sex offender, was soon abandoned after being condemned – especially by a coalition of charities, police and probation representatives – for its 'populist, punitive ... rhetoric' and encouragement of vigilantism (Bingham and Settle 2015). More recently, the BBC's decision to not broadcast a *Newsnight* investigation into reports that Jimmy Savile was a serial sexual abuser – which had been due to air on 7th December 2011, but was withdrawn from the schedule because of his death on 29th October – attracted widespread criticism of the BBC, and resulted in the resignation of *Newsnight* editor Peter Rippon. And ITV's airing of a documentary entitled *Exposure: The Other Side of*

⁶⁶ Please note that the term 'paedophile' denotes an adult or someone in their late adolescence who is either primarily or exclusively sexually attracted to prepubescent children, but that, in common parlance, it is often misused to refer to an adult who is primarily or exclusively sexually attracted to those under the age of consent. Naturally, this thesis adheres to the correct use of the term, hence the reference to 'the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people', as opposed to 'paedophilia'.

Jimmy Savile, on 3rd October 2012, provoked a large and still growing number of people to speak out about their victimhood.

In fact, general levels of interest in tackling the socio-cultural phenomenon of the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people have burgeoned in contemporary British society. For instance, amongst the various charities that are instrumental in supporting victims, Childline – a free, 24-hour counselling service for children and young people up to the age of nineteen – was launched in 1986, merging with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty Against Children (NSPCC) in 2006, but retaining its name and remit. And in the same month as the aforementioned ITV documentary, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) began Operation Yewtree, an investigation into sexual abuse allegations, predominantly the abuse of children, against Savile and others, leading (thus far) to the conviction of, amongst others, Gary Glitter, Dave Lee Travis, Max Clifford and Rolf Harris. Further to this, in January 2013, the MPS and the NSPCC released *Giving Victims a Voice*, ‘a joint report ... into allegations of sexual abuse made against Jimmy Savile under Operation Yewtree’ (Gray and Watt 2013: 1). And in, respectively, July 2014 and August 2014, the then Home Secretary, Theresa May, announced the *Independent Inquiry into Child Sex Abuse* (IICSA), which was reconstituted as a Statutory Inquiry in February 2015, and Professor Alexis Jay, who had led an *Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham* (1997-2013), published her report.

Exactly how cinematic depictions of the sexual abuse and exploitation of girls at the hands of men constitute interventions into debates about the socio-cultural phenomenon of the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people is, ultimately, impossible to pin down. As already indicated, some of the films in question are semi-autobiographical or biographical in nature but, in general, attempts to delineate the relationship between a socio-cultural phenomenon and a cinematic representation of said phenomenon are necessarily speculative, since films are not to be regarded as raw sociological data or, even, a mirror of reality. Nevertheless, there is clearly a parallel growth of interest in the socio-cultural phenomenon of the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people – on the one hand, from the media, the police and the government, who are investigating an increasing number of allegations; and on the other hand, in contemporary British cinema, which explores the subject in fictional form, in some cases, inspired by real-life events. Indeed, the latter is arguably a noteworthy adjunct to the former, as well as an interesting response in its own right.

(i) Prostitution

Of the five films at hand, it is notable that two of them are concerned with the prostitution of working-class girls and hone in on three particular factors – why they end up in it, what it involves physically and emotionally, and how they try to resist it. For example, *Stella Does Tricks* (1996) possesses a non-linear narrative structure that juxtaposes its protagonist’s past and present – including, conspicuously, her present-day daydreams – in

such a manner that implies a causal relationship between the childhood sexual abuse that she has endured at the hands of her father and the prostitution that she is drawn into as an adolescent. Most explicitly, a scene in which she is gang-raped at the behest of her noticeably middle-class pimp, Mr Peters (James Bolam), is intercut with a sequence showing her as a little girl trying to wriggle free of her father's disquieting hold, with the dialogue of the former and the image of the latter overlaid at one point, and the dialogue of both the former and the latter interwoven at another point, accentuating the similarity of the two situations:

Father: Funny, funny thing, Stella. Oh, Stella. I only want... Stella!

Stella: Leave me alone!

Father: Stella, darling.

Peters: You don't understand, Stella; you're too young to see. But that's alright.

Father: Aye, it's alright, wee hen.'

And more abstractly, another scene in which she is with a customer is intercut with a daydream sequence that sees her step into an adjacent room to justify her line of work to her father and aunt. Meanwhile, although *London to Brighton* (2006) is nowhere near as explicit in its delineation of its protagonists' past – in fact, Kelly's remains an unknown – a conversation that takes place during the eponymous train journey explains how Joanne ended up at Waterloo Train Station, which is where she is shown earlier to have first met Kelly, who then took her to Derek (Johnny Harris), the pimp who arranged her first job:

Kelly: Why the fuck did you run away?

Joanne: 'Cause living at home was shit. My Mum's dead, isn't she? And my Dad was a bastard. He beat me. He was always pissed. The other week I nicked his fags and he kicked me in the ribs.'

In short, both films seek to establish a connection between a troubled upbringing and prostitution during adolescence.

Further to this, both films explore the line between financial need and prostitution. On one side, Stella's pecuniary dependence upon such a line of work is emphasised in two particular episodes: firstly, when Peters discovers that she has a boyfriend and expels her from his boarding house/brothel, leading to her having to look for work; and secondly, when her boyfriend uses their rent money, earned solely by her, to buy himself heroin, and then pimps her out to their landlord. On the other side, Joanne's entry into prostitution is drawn as a direct consequence of her indigence, with Kelly finding Joanne begging, framing Derek's subsequent offer of £100 for her first job as somewhat expedient. Moreover, *Stella Does Tricks* (1996) dares to complicate its examination of the dynamics of prostitution by imbuing Peters's persona with paternal qualities that go some way towards counterbalancing his cruelty, and Stella's character, with an emotional vulnerability that makes her open to such

manipulation, thereby rendering her reliance upon him of a psychological as well as a monetary – indeed, class-based – nature. In the film's opening scene, for instance, it is suggested that he likes to think of himself as a benevolent father figure of sorts, as he makes her masturbate him under the cover of a newspaper whilst reciting the line, 'You're the nice man who took me in ... like in numerous of the works of Dickens', to which he responds, 'Good girl. Lovely girl. Now tell me, tell me your dreams. You stay a good girl, I'll make them true, just like in numerous of the works.' However, as indicated in this ominous introduction, the narrative reveals him to be far from philanthropic. Figured as another version of her abusive father, he oscillates between, on the one hand, showing affection and empathy, and providing material security in the form of accommodation and spending money, and on the other hand, abusing and exploiting her sexually – with the level of cruelty that he inflicts upon her culminating in the aforementioned gang rape scene. Indeed, two particular moments serve to highlight his pernicious hold over her – one in which she does not merely offer to masturbate him, but veritably insists that she does so, such is her perverse attachment to him; and another where he cries as he watches her being gang-raped, and she reaches out to him and clasps his hand in search of comfort.

Nevertheless, whilst these facets of *Stella Does Tricks* (1996) and *London to Brighton* (2006) draw attention to their protagonists' victimhood, it is important to recognise that such pessimism is counterbalanced by feats of defiance and retribution which grant the girls with a courage, independence, resilience and resourcefulness that, to an extent, heroises them. As referenced earlier, Stella's ability to take herself off into the world of her imagination helps her to put up a resistance to the psychological control and sexual exploitation inflicted upon her. And alongside this, she not only pranks a customer by inserting a Fisherman's friend lozenge into his anus, instead of cannabis resin, but also, pivotally, carries out three inspired acts of retaliation: scratching with a screwdriver and then setting alight to a car belonging to a man who assaulted one of her co-workers; confronting her father backstage at one of his stand-up gigs, and setting his penis alight by squirting lighter fluid and then throwing a lighter at it; and instigating Peters's arrest when she spots him with another girl in the very same park bandstand in which he used to instruct her to masturbate him. Analogously, instead of losing her virginity to a sixty-something man with a penchant for young girls, Joanne kills him by stabbing him with the knife that he had been using to tear off her clothes and, in the denouement, is even forgiven by the man's son, whom, it turns out, has long hated his father. Ergo, it can be summated that, although Stella comes to commit suicide and Kelly's future remains uncertain, the three protagonists across *Stella Does Tricks* (1996) and *London to Brighton* (2006) are positioned as not only victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, but also, critically, agents of resistance and revenge – Joanne, finally and most successfully, pictured being welcomed at the threshold of her grandmother's house.

(ii) Other Forms of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

When it comes to the remaining titles, it is worth noting that *The Unloved* (2009) and *Summer Scars* (2007) also showcase a degree of defiance. When Peter (Kevin Howarth) forces Leanne to, at one point, take off her hoodie and vest, and look at his penis, which he then urges her to touch – following a series of degrading acts that she and her friends have been made to endure at his whim – one of the teenagers shoots him with a Glock pistol, allowing her and the others to run out of the woods, where they had been having fun truanting until Peter showed up. And whilst frequent POV shots highlight Lucy's misfortune at being witness to the emotional manipulation and sexual exploitation of her roommate – with her discomfort at the presence of care worker Ben (Craig Parkinson) made clear by close-ups of her facial expressions, especially when he and Lauren (Lauren Socha) disappear under the bedcovers – she slips out of the children's home after one particular incident and, finding that her mother is not home or does not want to answer the door, wanders around Nottingham until the next morning. In short, one girl is rescued, and another removes herself from the sight – and, indeed, site – of sexual abuse and exploitation.

However, *Top Spot* (2004) is overwhelmingly bleak in its depiction of sexual encounters between girls and various unnamed and unseen adults – with the anonymity of the latter serving to accentuate the secretive nature of the sexual abuse and exploitation perpetrated, as well as the lack of responsibility taken. Indeed, although the DVD cover claims that 'the film captures the true essence of being a teenager' (Tartan Video 2006), it focuses conspicuously upon the sexual lives of six teenage girls and, in particular, their experiences of predatory adults, in the main, men. Furthermore, unlike in *Stella Does Tricks* (1996) and *London to Brighton* (2006), these men do not even pay; they simply take. Emin's opening voiceover sets the tone as she describes the eponymous nightclub in Margate:

'Top Spot was here. Here's somewhere. Giant ballroom with chandeliers and red velvet curtains. We'd snog and kiss, be fingered, titted-up. It was a place to experiment. But you know what 'top spot' is, don't you? 'Top spot' is when a man has sex with a woman or a girl, where his penis hits the neck of her womb. That's when it hits 'top spot'. I mean, who would ever call a teenage disco 'top spot'?'

Following this, five of the six protagonists are interviewed by an unnamed and unseen Emin, revealing a range of sexual encounters that sound, at best, experimental, at worst, humiliating, and are notably incongruous with the conservatism of the girls' school uniforms. Questioned about her Christmas holidays, Katie imparts that, whilst they had begun well, as she had 'just got ... back' her two front teeth [no explanation given], New Year's Eve came to a nasty end when a man ('a bloke I knew') demanded a kiss, and then 'got a bit much' and 'broke into' her 'down an alleyway' – an incident which is partially represented in a later sequence showing her pulling up her ripped tights and walking off up the alleyway in a daze, as the incongruously upbeat soundtrack of Shirley and Company's *Shame Shame Shame* (1975) begins to play, and an act whose cruelty is emphasised by the detail that her mother's only response was to wash her coat. Next, Frances explains why she enjoys romantic novels and eighteenth-century novels so much – 'it takes my mind somewhere else' – leading her to disclose that she does not like to be 'alone' in 'the dark,

the silence' because 'people can't hear you screaming', letting slip, 'people came in my room'. Further to this, Elizabeth admits that she has had sex with 'quite a lot of people' – 'a lot of men' – declaring that she does not care if people call her a 'slag', and attempting to justify her behaviour: 'It don't mean nothing, though. Don't see the harm in it. It's free, innit?' And lastly, Kieri initially lies about a love bite on her neck, claiming that she and her friends used a Hoover to achieve the effect 'for a laugh', and then confesses that a woman, whose house she and her friends visit when they truant, 'makes [them] do things.'

Moreover, the repercussions of these sexual encounters are delineated further in three later sequences. Firstly, sitting on her bed and, in stark contrast to the subject matter, stroking a kitten, Frances confides directly to the camera: 'I never want to marry. I never want to have a boyfriend. I hate going to sleep at night. I hate being on my own. I hate what he did to me. He makes me feel sick. Standing there, touching himself while he's looking at me. I wish I'd killed him.' Secondly, hanging out at the beach one day, Katie, Helen and Frances express their concerns about Kieri and Laura's visits to the aforementioned woman's house – 'Look at your neck! Why do you even go round there? What are you going to do about it?' asks Katie; 'I think you're fucking mad,' opines Helen; 'I think we should burn her bleeding house down,' suggests Frances. And thirdly and most graphically – indeed, the key reason for the British Board of Film Classification's decision to award the film an 18-certificate – an intimate handheld montage, to the tense sound of running water and then the solemn drip of a tap, conveys that Elizabeth ended up giving birth alone, in her family bathroom, and then committed suicide by slitting her wrists with a razor, leaving the rest of the girls to speculate, in the subsequent scene, as to where her mother was, what she did with the baby ('Flushed it down the toilet'), whether 'her eyes popped out', and what they would do if they got pregnant at their age.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that there are some clear attempts to broaden the concerns of the narrative beyond that of sexual abuse and exploitation. One sequence showing Elizabeth, Frances, Helen and Kieri in the Powell-Cotton Museum of Natural History and Ethnography, Birchington, includes a travelling shot of a display charting the life stages of an African tribal female – 'infant', 'little girl', 'older girl', 'bride', 'older woman' – serving as a reminder that the film is a meditation upon the experience of growing up female. And another scene takes the commentary upon the female coming-of-age process further by spelling out three of the girls' ideas about love and marriage. Sitting next to each other in bed, Frances, Helen and Kieri read about and discuss love and romance. Frances declaims an erotic extract from Gustav Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*: 'The cloth of her habit clung to the velvet of his coat. She threw back her head, her white throat swelled in a sigh, and without resisting, tears streaming, with a long shudder and her face hidden, she gave herself to him.' Helen and Frances recite ancient Egyptian poetry of a similar bent: 'Let me be the one to coil all around you. Lead me astray and let your body be the pasture where I graze. And then, for all I care, let a stranger see me, or someone from my hometown, or a traveller, a man of my heart, or a priest, or even my husband.' Kieri

relays the contents of a magazine article about ‘the crazy things people do to prove they’re in love’, citing a woman who ‘brought her husband a double plot in a graveyard so they could be buried together’; ‘they’re not together now,’ she adds. Helen announces that she has known who she wants to marry ever since he kissed her – oblivious to the fact that the boy with whom she is infatuated has not gone to Egypt with the French Foreign Legion, as he has claimed, but is actually in borstal. And whilst Frances explains that she cannot see herself getting married, as she ‘just ... can’t be with anyone’ – echoing her aforementioned revulsion at the thought of having an intimate relationship with a boy or a man – Kieri announces that she wants to ‘get married, be normal’, prompting Frances to query, ‘Why do you have to get married just to be normal?’ Hence whilst *Top Spot* (2004) is unequivocally preoccupied with exploring the sexual abuse and exploitation of girls, it is also keen to showcase how, in spite of such damaging experiences, a girl can still feel capable of falling in love with and getting married to a man, demonstrating either naivety or resilience.

Consensual Sexual Encounters and Relationships

Set alongside the five films portraying the sexual abuse and exploitation of girls at the hands of men, nine films offer an alternative take on the configuration of the girl and the man by depicting consensual but problematic sexual encounters and relationships. And not only does the play of victimhood and agency have a discernibly different complexion in these films, since the girls are positioned as willing, as opposed to coerced, participants, but issues of class are drawn as a factor too, albeit in somewhat predictable ways. As outlined earlier, Hill addresses the morally ambivalent dynamics of the consensual relationship between the eponymous protagonists of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1987) – Rita and Sue, working-class, and Bob, middle-class. And in *Kidulthood* (2006), although the working-class girls’ sexual encounters with three middle-class men are consensual – with Becky fellating and Alisa masturbating two of the men in exchange for cannabis, cocaine and ecstasy, and Becky then giving the cannabis to and sleeping with another man in exchange for money – they are essentially transactional in nature. Furthermore, as shall be shown, *Wish You Were Here* (1987), *An Awfully Big Adventure* (1995), *Me Without You* (2001), *An Education* (2009), *Fish Tank* (2009), *Albatross* (2011) and *Ginger and Rosa* (2012) all feature a girl and a man in a clearly consensual but conspicuously unconventional and ethically questionable relationship – the working-class girl usually pictured as overtly sexual and thus drawn to a man who is willing to engage with her accordingly; and the middle-class girl typically cast as sexually curious, but more interested in accruing cultural capital and developing intellectual capacity, therefore, intrigued by a man who has one or both of these qualities and can assist her in her growth.

Further to this, it is essential to recognise that whilst the majority of the girls are positioned as either of or above the age of consent, those of *Kidulthood* (2006) and *Fish Tank* (2009) are, at fifteen years old, under age, making these particular titles controversial

in legal terms. And as with the autobiographical or biographical elements of *Stella Does Tricks* (1996), *Top Spot* (2004) and *The Unloved* (2009), five of the films have some basis in reality. *Wish You Were Here* (1987) is inspired by stories that 'a notorious British madam named Cynthia Payne, who ran a house of ill repute for old-age pensioners and retired military men with kinky taste', told writer and director David Leland 'about her childhood, when sex was something nobody talked about and sexual initiation was accompanied by ignorance, fear and psychic trauma' (Ebert 1987). *An Awfully Big Adventure* (1995) is adapted from a semi-autobiographical novel of the same name. *An Education* (2009) is based upon an autobiographical essay of the same name by journalist Lynn Barber (2003). *Albatross* (2011) is a semi-autobiographical screenplay. And *Ginger and Rosa* (2012) is loosely autobiographical.

(i) Working-Class Girls

Whilst Powrie chooses to classify *Wish You Were Here* (1987), set in the early 1950s, as one of four 'alternative heritage' 'rite of passage films' that 'tend towards a cosy nostalgia ... and, more often than not, combine an obsession with sexuality with whimsy, if not comedy', identifying Lynda as 'sexually precocious' (2000: 316), he fails to acknowledge the darkness of her relationship with one of her father's acquaintances, fifty-something Eric (Tom Bell), who takes sexual advantage of her repeatedly. Significantly, their first encounter sees him assault her sexually by putting his hand up her dress and touching her genitalia whilst whispering menacing insults and orders – an experience that is made all the more invasive for taking place in the family living room when her father is out, and all the more distasteful for being capped by a supposedly jocular exchange when her father returns and 'offer[s]' to sell her for 'half a dollar'. Thus it is puzzling that she willingly meets Eric for further sexual encounters in the garden shed of the family home, and runs away from home, to him, with the expectation of being taken in – his maltreatment of her culminating in a sequence in which his initial hostility to her unexpected arrival gives way to him instructing her to lay on his bed, and then undressing her, despite her obvious distress at her predicament.

Importantly, in a similar vein to *Stella Does Tricks* (1996), Lynda's motivation is suggested through the juxtaposition of her past and present-day experiences. Like the title of the film, and as implied in a sequence in which her father takes her to a psychiatrist, who 'conjecture[s] that something has most definitely happened to [her] during her adolescence', the bookending of her departure from home and arrival at Eric's intimates that her provocative and risk-taking behaviour is a response to the combination of her mother's death and father's frustration with her – a form of attention and comfort seeking in the face of grief and rejection. Prior to the sequence, her father's despair at her sexual activity prompts her to go to her mother's wardrobe and not only smell one of the dresses, but also put on one of the coats, which she then wears to Eric's. And following the image of her sobbing as Eric undresses her, a shot of her looking forlornly out of his bedroom window

cuts to a shot of her as a dejected young girl staring blankly out of her bedroom window on what transpires to be the day of her mother's funeral. Nevertheless, in spite of the attempts of the narrative to rationalise Lynda's choice of Eric as lover and then partner, and to imbue her with an air of defiance, it is essential to recognise that, overall, the disturbing nature of Lynda's relationship with Eric cuts against the 'cosy nostalgia', 'whimsy' and 'comedy' highlighted by Powrie (2000: 316).

In comparison, *An Awfully Big Adventure* (1995), which is set in the late 1940s, also follows a sexually forthright girl whose relationship with a markedly older man is inextricably intertwined with the death of her mother, but this time, there is an especially disconcerting denouement. Like Lynda, Stella is keen to gain sexual experience and noticeably open about the matter, admitting to using forty-something actor P. L. O'Hara (Alan Rickman), who joins the theatre troupe in which she is a runner, in order to become sexually proficient in the hope that the object of her affection, director of the troupe Meredith Potter (Hugh Grant), whose homosexuality evades her, will one day desire her: 'I'm beginning to get the hang of fucking. It's no better than learning to play the ukulele. You just need practice,' she pronounces nonchalantly to O'Hara after sex with him one day. However, unlike in *Wish You Were Here* (1987), the causal relationship between a sense of loss and a search for connection in *An Awfully Big Adventure* (1995) is applicable to not only the girl, but also the man, and in a strikingly contentious way. Strangely drawn to Stella when he first speaks to her ('I know her,' he exclaims afterwards), O'Hara quickly becomes her lover, generally content to help her express and explore herself sexually, and a little peeved when he asks her, 'Don't you love me just a little bit?', and she flatly replies, 'No, I love another', but not bothered enough to end the arrangement. Hence the benefits of the relationship are framed as mutual. But when O'Hara visits Stella's Uncle Vernon (Alun Armstrong) and Aunt Lily (Rita Tushingham), he learns that she has been lying about talking to her mother on the phone, since her mother's whereabouts are unbeknownst to the family, and then comes to realise that her mother is actually his long lost love, making her his daughter. Ergo, if the plot of *Wish You Were Here* (1987) threads together the death of a mother and a troubled relationship with a man on a psychological level, the narrative of *An Awfully Big Adventure* (1995) presents a biological connection, specifically, in the form of accidental incest.

Next to *Wish You Were Here* (1987) and *An Awfully Big Adventure* (1995), *Fish Tank* (2009) provides perhaps the most fully developed portrayal of a consensual but questionable relationship between a working-class girl and a man, and not only is there, once again, a link between the girl's mother and the man, but this time, the mother is neither dead nor missing but very much part of the action. Thirty-something Connor (Michael Fassbender), with whom Mia becomes friendly and then intimate, is actually her mother's boyfriend, and although there is no suggestion that Joanne (Kierston Wareing) learns of exactly how close he and Mia become, he is shown to inspire a palpable rivalry within an already highly strained mother-daughter relationship. Mia is clearly intrigued by

Joanne's relationship with Connor, and seems almost envious of her mother's sexuality, for example, watching them as they dance together at a party, gazing at her dancing around in her underwear in the kitchen after he has spent the night, and spying on them having sex one night – framed, each time, as a voyeur, as she, respectively, looks on from a staircase, stares through a kitchen hatch, and peers through an ajar door. Yet as exemplified when she deliberately undermines her mother in front of him – 'Why are you talking different?' – she acts as if she disapproves of their behaviour, creating significant tension, and likewise, Joanne patently resents her teenage daughter's presence when Connor is around, for instance, pinching her arm and warning her to get back to her room during the aforementioned party, instructing her to 'get some clothes on' when she appears in boy-cut briefs and a tight t-shirt and leans over the kitchen sink in order to drink from the tap, and asking pointedly, 'What the fuck are you doing?', when she sees them dancing around together. Thus the grounds are laid for a generational competition which results in Mia and Connor having sex in the living room, as Joanne lies in a drunken stupor upstairs, and him fleeing the scene, leaving Joanne bereft.

Moreover, Arnold's bold depiction of burgeoning adolescent sexuality meets adult sexual confidence is all the more startling for its intense physicality and, at times, sensuality, marking it out as a noteworthy attempt to portray adolescent female sexuality – particularly in a socio-cultural climate of heightened anxiety about sexual relations between girls and men. That is, whilst *Wish You Were Here* (1987) and *An Awfully Big Adventure* (1995) are certainly sexually explicit, in as much that their protagonists are frank about their sexual desire, uninhibited about nudity, and liberal in their use of lewd language, *Fish Tank* (2009) is conspicuously intimate in stylistic terms. Crucially, Mia is shown to possess a singular physical agency: striding through her estate, down roads, and across fields; headbutting a girl when they get into an argument; attempting to liberate a horse chained to a rock, and then wrestling herself free and sprinting away from its owners; practising hard to prepare an audition tape for a club looking for dancers; and running away from a meeting about a place in a Pupil Referral Unit. And critically, too, a favoured use of the Steadicam helps to capture her vigour by not only following her every move, but also hovering remarkably closely to her – so near, at times, that she appears out of focus, and sometimes allied with the amplified sound of her breathing in order to enhance the sense of being in close proximity to her. Thus it follows that Mia and Connor's relationship is characterised by a pronounced physicality.

For example, two of Mia and Connor's early interactions not only draw attention to movement, physical attraction, and touch, but also have significant sexual overtones. Firstly, when he catches her gyrating her hips to a music video in the kitchen – his viewpoint implied by the camera's position at hip level and behind her – he remarks, 'Don't mind me, girl. Carry on. I was enjoying it. ... You dance like a black. It's a compliment.' And as she watches him make a cup of tea, the camera lingers on his taut back and the way in which his low-slung jeans reveal the small of his back, indicating an appreciative gaze on her part.

Secondly, on the night of the aforementioned party, when she (deliberately?) falls asleep in her mother's bedroom, the manner in which he puts her to bed is both potentially paternal and sexually suggestive. Pretending to be asleep, she allows him to carry her to her bedroom, and then remove her trainers and tracksuit bottoms – the dim lighting, augmented sound of her slow and steady breathing, and shots of her stealing a glance at him, serving to emphasise the intimacy of the experience – but whilst his approach is demonstrably caring, the unnecessary act of removing her trousers may also be interpreted as inappropriate and opportunistic.

Similarly, although there is an overwhelmingly familial atmosphere in a sequence in which Connor drives Mia, her mother and her younger sister, Tyler (Rebecca Williams), to a nearby beauty spot, its latter half is also sexually evocative – Connor, once again, both fatherly and flirtatious, and Mia, as before, suitably responsive. Quickly removing her trainers, rolling up her tracksuit bottoms and wading into the river, she is tangibly thrilled when he, in parent mode, decides that he wants to catch a fish and asks for help. Hence, ignoring her mother's grumble about ruining her clothes and her sister's jeer about scaring the fish with her "ugly feet", a fish is noodled⁶⁷ and carried to the bank. However, what ensues is strikingly carnal in character. A long static shot of the gasping fish on the grass (six seconds) echoes the film's opening image of Mia catching her breath after dancing (eighteen seconds). And when Connor suddenly thrusts a stick into the fish's mouth and deftly pushes the makeshift spit through the length of its body, the impulsive and penetrational nature of this act foreshadows the episode where he seems unable to resist sexual intercourse with Mia. Furthermore, when he praises her for being the only one to agree to eat the fish for dinner, binds the scratches on her ankle, and piggybacks her to the car, the combination of his warmth and her receptivity is potent. To the heightened sound of his regular, deep breaths, and leaves rustling in the breeze, a lengthy tracking shot of the piggyback ride (twenty-six seconds) sees her relax into his comfortable and purposeful stride, coming even to rest her chin upon his shoulder.

Further to this, if there is any one form of physical communication that is especially important to Mia and Connor's relationship, it is dance. As already described, it is an initial talking point and an activity which provokes, in one instance, envy from Mia, and in another instance, jealousy on the part of Joanne. And more generally, it is framed as a common interest which, when performed, lends itself to a symbolic reading, in as much that it evokes images of any number of formal or informal courtship rituals involving this particular mode of bodily expression. Pivotal, for instance, Mia reveals to Connor alone her ambition to find work dancing in a club, prompting him to lend her his video camera in order to put together an audition tape. And although the chapter in which he offers her the camera and shows her how to operate it does not involve either of them dancing, his encouragement has a perceptibly positive effect upon her, turning her scowls into smiles and bringing out

⁶⁷ 'Noodling' is fishing using bare hands.

her sense of humour, whilst a growing bond is made visible through their changing body language, which shows them to be increasingly comfortable around one another. More specifically, when she visits him at his place of work and tells him of her plan, he cleans and bandages her ankle wound again, allowing her to rest her left foot upon his right knee and her left hand upon his right-hand shoulder. And when she gets home to find him changing out of his work clothes in her mother's bedroom, she sits on the bed and uses his camera to document his semi-naked state – footage which she watches back in the privacy of her bedroom, and a sequence that culminates in him leaning in close to her to ask her what she thinks of his aftershave, and then putting her over his knee in order to dispense a playful 'good hiding' after she jokes that he smells like 'fox piss'. In short, a mutual appreciation of dance is intrinsic to the progress of their relationship. Indeed, inspired by hearing him play and sing along to Bobby Womack's version of *California Dreamin'* on the aforementioned outing to the countryside, she composes a second audition piece, and her performance of it to him is figured as a preamble – foreplay, as it were – to sexual intercourse. Although in her pyjamas in a living room on a council estate, the combination of a feature wall depicting a tropical beach scene, illuminated by the yellow-orange glow of a street light, positions her as if on a stage with a backlight. And whilst some of her movements are rather stiff, the choreography marks a clear departure from her usual hip-hop style – showing experimentation with a slower, more elegant approach and, thereby, eliciting Connor's praise, which, in turn, leads to an invitation to sit next to him on the sofa, and then kissing and sex.

In addition, it is essential to recognise that Mia's distinctive physical agency is a key feature of not only her budding relationship with Connor, but also the acts of revenge that she perpetrates after discovering that he is, in fact, married with a young daughter. After breaking into his house, helping herself to a can of Heineken, and finding footage of his wife and daughter, Kelly (Joanna Horton) and Keira (Sydney Mary Nash), on a video camera in the living room, Mia is manifestly perturbed and somewhat territorially urinates on the carpet before leaving. Then, when the family returns home, she kidnaps the daughter as she plays on her scooter, pretending that the mother has suggested that they go to buy some ice cream, but actually leading the little girl into fenced-off grassland, where there are clear hazards – from the violent clatter and dust clouds of combine harvesters in an adjacent field, as revealed by a long shot highlighting the girls' insignificance and vulnerability in the landscape, to a choppy body of water that becomes the site of arguably the film's most frightening moment. More specifically, after Mia forces Keira through a hole in a chain-fence, the former hurting her hand and the latter tearing her dress, the two girls take to throwing stones at one another. And when Keira breaks away and bolts towards the water, and Mia attempts to restrain her and has her shins kicked in the process, the inevitable happens, leading Mia to rescue Keira from drowning by using a stick originally wielded as a weapon. Ergo, it is fitting that when Mia returns Keira home, Connor gives chase, first, in his car, and then on foot, finally catching up with her and knocking her to the ground with a

backhanded slap that brings their relationship to an appropriately and emphatically physically forceful end.

If *Wish You Were Here* (1987), *An Awfully Big Adventure* (1985) and *Fish Tank* (2009) put emphasis upon the carnal aspects of a relationship between a girl and a man, both pairs of girls in *Albatross* (2009) and *Ginger and Rosa* (2012) take the form of a friendship between, on one side, a serious-minded middle-class girl, and on the other side, a working-class girl whose relationship with her friend's father is not only sexual in nature, but also intellectual and spiritual, serving to create significant tension between the girls. In a nutshell, *Albatross* (2009) sees aspiring author Emilia acquire a job as a cleaner in Beth's family's guest house and gradually become involved with Beth's father, once-famous novelist Jonathan Fischer (Sebastian Koch), leading to the completion of her first manuscript. And in *Ginger and Rosa* (2012), Rosa ends up moving in with and becoming pregnant by Ginger's father, Roland (Alessandro Nivola), a Professor who is estranged from his wife, and whose experiences as a conscientious objector figure as an instrumental source of fascination and empathy in the coupling.

More specifically, whilst Emilia first encounters Jonathan when he is masturbating to pornography in his study, it soon transpires that, despite being at very different stages in their journeys as writers – Emilia unpublished but enthusiastic, and Jonathan published but uninspired – both have a compulsion to write, but are suffering writer's block. Emilia's 'albatross' is that she dwells upon her mother's suicide and believes (misguidedly, it turns out) that she is a descendant of Arthur Conan Doyle, whose name she feels she can never live up to. Jonathan's 'albatross' is that he suspects that his best work is behind him and knows that his marriage is as good as over. Hence when Jonathan offers Emilia free tuition, she accepts readily and there begins a process of mentorship which, on the one hand, temporarily becomes a love affair, resulting in the end of both Jonathan's marriage and Emilia's friendship with Beth, and on the other hand, sets Emilia and Jonathan on the right path professionally. That is, in the same way that Jonathan's general encouragement, advice to write from one's own experience, and gifting of his laptop, proves invaluable in motivating and enabling Emilia to pursue her ambition, so his admission to her that he feels like a spent force in terms of his own creative output allows him to move on by getting a job teaching creative writing. Furthermore, in the final scene, the girls appear to be reconciled with the situation, if not each other – Beth ignoring Emilia's wave, but then looking down at her t-shirt, which used to belong to Emilia, and smiling. In short, Emilia and Beth's friendship is framed as an unfortunate sacrifice in order for Emilia to develop as a writer through her relationship with Beth's father.

By comparison, the dynamic between Rosa and Roland is not so much that of an adolescent being guided by an adult but, rather, the identification of two people whose age gap is conspicuous, yet who bond on an emotional and physical level, and try to build a life together in spite of the unorthodox nature of their relationship and, indeed, hurt caused to

others. On the surface, they make an unlikely couple. Whilst Rosa is defined by her promiscuity, intense friendship with Ginger, troubled relationship with her mother, and fascination with Catholicism, Roland is marked by his radical politics, strained relationship with his estranged wife, reluctance to embrace fatherhood in any conventional sense of the word, and encouragement of his daughter's revolutionary ideals. However, when Roland begins to reveal to Rosa his experiences as a conscientious objector and feelings about his mother's departure from the family home when he was a child, her empathy is striking, and he, both pleased and touched, begins to take more of an interest in her and eventually asks her to move in with him.

Moreover, whilst *Wish You Were Here* (1987) engages with the 'popular perception of the 1950s' as 'a period of domestic and sexual stalemate prior to the explosion of "permissiveness" in the 1960s' (Hill 1986: 16) – setting up a tension between Lynda's lack of sexual inhibition and decision to be a single mother, and her father and community's conservative attitudes towards female sexuality and, in particular, young female sexuality – *Ginger and Rosa* (2012) positions Rosa and Roland's relationship as a vehicle for the exploration of issues of femininity in early 1960s Britain (specifically, 1962), with Rosa, like Billy of *Billy Elliot* (2000) and Liam of *Sweet Sixteen* (2002), as discussed in the previous chapter, 'on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to another' (Bakhtin 2006: 23). To be precise, Rosa is decidedly dismissive of both her mother and Ginger's mother, whom she judges to be 'pathetic' – 'they don't believe in anything ... it's no wonder they can't keep their men,' she declares – in particular, notably scornful of her mother's menial job as a cleaner, and appearing to blame her mother for her father's absence. Thus in one way she resembles a burgeoning second-wave feminist, pushing for more than her mother's 'lot'. However, when she moves in with Roland, she is transformed into the archetype of traditional femininity – on one side, an attentive girlfriend who makes herself up for a meal out with Roland and massages his shoulders as he types; and on the other side, an aspiring housewife who, in contrast to Ginger's mother, whose act of baking Roland his favourite pie goes unacknowledged, presents him with her first spaghetti Bolognese and is praised accordingly as 'a thing of beauty'. Whereas Emilia eventually ends her relationship with Jonathan and finds fulfilment through creative writing, Rosa is caught between the domesticity modelled by her mother, and coming of age at a time when an increasing number of women were entering the workplace and the sexual liberation movement was growing – in the end, rendered a hypocrite by coming to emulate the very kind of womanhood against which she had once defined herself.

(ii) Middle-Class Girls

Whilst *Albatross* (2009) and *Ginger and Rosa* (2012) place a working-class girl in a relationship with her middle-class friend's father, and pit the relationship against the friendship, *Me Without You* (2002) features two middle-class girls whose simultaneous involvement with one of their middle-aged professors contributes to the overall picture of

an increasingly volatile friendship. In an echo of the dynamics between Beth and Emilia, and Ginger and Rosa, Holly and Marina are, respectively, studious and sexually provocative, and when Daniel (Kyle MacLachlan) begins to take a personal interest in them, both seek to amplify their individual appeal, whilst also, significantly, aping each other. More specifically, Holly and Daniel share a love of classic French literature and art cinema, and Marina and Daniel bond when she provides him with drugs, takes him to an alternative music venue, and then seduces him. But as encapsulated by the intercutting of two countryside walks – one where Holly suggests that she and Daniel have sex then and there, and the other where Marina proposes a trip to the cinema to watch an Ingmar Bergman film – there is a palpable tension between the carnal and the cerebral across the relationships. Furthermore, in contrast to Rita and Sue of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1987), who are by and large happy for Bob to divide his attention between them, and would appear to be satisfied with a *ménage à trois*, Holly and Marina take some time to realise that Daniel is dating both of them, and then respond in different ways. Whereas Marina simply continues the arrangement, Holly responds to Daniel's plea of ignorance about the girls' friendship, and attempted reassurance that she is 'such an incredible girl, woman' who will one day meet someone of her own age, by threatening him with the Vice Chancellor.

In comparison, *An Education* (2009) follows lower middle-class grammar school pupil Jenny as she develops a relationship with thirty-something David Goldman (Peter Sarsgaard) – a *bon vivant* and, it turns out, thief and underling of slum landlord Peter Rachman⁶⁸ – and then leaves him after discovering that he is already married with children, eventually taking up a place to read English at the University of Oxford. Wooing her with the sights and sounds of Central London, Oxford and Paris, he shows her a world beyond the uniformity and mediocrity of early 1960s (specifically, 1961) suburban Twickenham, in particular, harnessing her desire to become more cultured:

'I'm going to read what I want and listen to what I want, and I'm going to look at paintings and watch French films, and I'm going to talk to people who know lots about lots. ... [A]fter I've been to university, I'm going to be French. I'm going to Paris, and I'm going to smoke and wear black and listen to Jacques Brel, and I won't, ever. C'est plus chic comme ça,'

she pronounces to her friends. And crucially, her experiences are framed as more enriching than unfortunate – last pictured cycling with poise through the centre of Oxford next to a young man who sneaks an admiring glance, as she tells the audience, in the only piece of voiceover in the film (a nod, perhaps, to its basis in Barber's autobiographical essay), 'I probably looked as wide-eyed, fresh and artless as any other student. But I wasn't.'

Importantly, too, although set in a different social milieu and at a different time, a line may be drawn between *An Education* (2009) and *Fish Tank* (2009), in as much that both entwine the role of spatial dislocation in stimulating adolescent growth, with the

⁶⁸ Peter Rachman (1919-1962) was a London landlord who became so notorious for exploiting and intimidating his tenants that 'Rachmanism' entered the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

protagonist's relationship with a man. Jenny's life in suburban Twickenham is figured as notably dull – her home and school, plain, neat and symmetrical – and especially constrictive. For example, when she immerses herself in the sounds of legendary chanson-artiste, Juliette Greco, singing *Sous le Ciel de Paris/Under the Parisian Sky*, in which lovers, philosophers, musicians, sailors and the homeless enjoy a bohemian existence under the watchful eye of the Parisian sky, a tight, bird's-eye view of her supine on her bedroom floor is palpably ironic. Likewise, her bedroom window functions as a symbol of feminine constraint (Pidduck, 1998: 381⁶⁹), with David's marriage proposal followed by a view of her almost imprisoned by the decorative lead pattern of her bedroom window, as she surveys quiet suburbia with a troubled expression. Thus when David introduces her to the grandeur of St John's in Smith's Square, the glamour and glitz of an exclusive nightclub, the buzz of a bar in Walthamstow Stadium, and the beauty of his apartment – transported from place to place in his handsome Bristol – she feels as if her world has opened up, and begins to change her ideas about her future, even becoming engaged. For instance, their trip to Paris is represented by a sequence in which Greco's *Sur les Quais du Vieux Paris/On the Riverbanks of Old Paris* plays over an extensive montage of Parisian images inspired by the tourist gaze. Taken from a boat passing under a bridge on the Seine, the opening shot gradually reveals the Eiffel Tower set against a clear, blue sky. The following shot sees Jenny and David looking up, presumably at the Eiffel Tower, and smiling. Jenny browses the bookstalls on the Left Bank and finds a book which she clutches to her heart. David assists Jenny as she takes theatrical strides atop a quay wall, high heels dangling from her left hand. Jenny poses for a photograph in front of Notre Dame, and is then seen in black and white through the viewfinder of David's Asahi Pentax. The shutter action of the Pentax forms a transition shot from the Parisian skyline to a high-angle shot of Jenny and David dashing up the steps of Montmartre, where a couple dance to the Greco soundtrack, now played on a record player. And finally, an impromptu picnic of wine, cheese and bread is enjoyed on a stone quay near the Pont des Arts at dusk.

Importantly, not everywhere that Jenny goes with David is upmarket. The first night of their Paris trip is spent at a cheap transit hotel, and he proposes to her in a rainy and windy car park. Overall, however, Jenny's romance with David is shown to unfold in beautiful or tasteful surroundings, allowing her to experiment with womanhood in ways which serve to enhance her cultural capital, if not her schoolwork. Moreover, as with *Wish You Were Here* (1987) and *Ginger and Rosa* (2012), Jenny's coming of age is situated at a time of pronounced social change regarding the place of women in British society. Caught between, on the one hand, her father's lack of cultural and intellectual depth, and backwards gender politics ('What's she going to do with an English degree? If she's going to spend three years playing that bloody cello, talking in French to a bunch of beatniks, well, I'm just throwing good money after bad.... [S]he might meet a nice lawyer there, but she

⁶⁹ Julianne Pidduck discusses the significance of windows and country walks in 1990s film and television adaptations of Jane Austen novels.

could do that at a dinner dance tomorrow!’ he remonstrates), and on the other hand, her school’s and, in particular, her English teacher’s expectation that she should go on to Oxford and break off her engagement to David, her choice is spelled out when she returns home from a concert and nightclub to find her mother in the kitchen scrubbing a burnt casserole dish. Although Jenny at one point looks as if she might opt for marriage instead of a degree, she is ultimately figured as a progressive young lady who symbolises second-wave feminism in her rejection of domesticity and pursuit of a university degree.

Conclusion

In girl-centred contemporary British coming-of-age films, sexual encounters and relationships between girls and men fall, then, into two main categories: sexual abuse and exploitation; and consensual but problematic relationships. On one level, the former and the latter stand in opposition. Where Stella (*Stella Does Tricks* [1996]), Kelly and Joanne are prostituted, and Frances and Katie assaulted – targets of male sexual aggression, whose pubescent state and sexual inexperience is fetishised and commodified – working-class Rita, Sue, Lynda, Stella (*An Awfully Big Adventure* [1995]), Alisa, Becky, Mia, Emilia and Rosa, and middle-class Holly, Marina and Jenny are willing participants who both encourage and actively pursue the men – their burgeoning sexuality not merely palpable, but translated into tangible sexual agency. However, some of the portrayals of sexual abuse and exploitation showcase acts of resistance and revenge, and across the depictions of consensual relationships is an underlying sense that the girls are, in one way or another, taken advantage of by the men – Eric, essentially a sex offender; Bob, Jonathan, Connor and David, married with children, and Connor also dating Mia’s mother; Daniel, unprofessional and duplicitous; and Roland turning out to have a blind side in terms of progressive gender politics. Moreover, Lynda and Rosa are drawn into domesticity – specifically, motherhood – at a notably young age, speaking to the conditions for females in the eras in which they are situated. Hence the configuration of the girl and the man counterbalances victimhood with agency, conveying a distinct ambivalence about relationships between girls and men.

It can be seen, then, that girl-centred contemporary British coming-of-age films rival boy-centred contemporary British coming-of-age films in terms of generic hybridity, and thematic, formal and stylistic diversity. Obviously, numerous features are, for reasons of space, not discussed here, such as (the further exploration of) the strand of films revolving around pairs of friends, the function of sisters, the role of mothers, and – as with the stories of the adolescent male experience – the part that relationships with people of one’s own age, and educational endeavours and professional pursuits, are shown to play in identity formation, the influence of British cinema’s longstanding tradition of social or working-class realism, and the main types of trajectory for the various protagonists. Nevertheless, it is hoped that in focusing on the configuration of the girl and the man, this chapter offers a helpful insight into one of the most dominant but under-discussed traits of girl-centred

contemporary British coming-of-age films and, more generally, illuminates the specific manifestation of the coming-of-age genre in contemporary British cinema.

Chapter Five

Minority Ethnic Adolescent Protagonists

in Contemporary British Cinema

Introduction

Whilst Chapters Three and Four explore lines of continuity in, respectively, boy-centred and girl-centred contemporary British coming-of-age films, this chapter considers those films in which issues of 'race' and ethnicity are shown to shape the coming-of-age process for protagonists from a minority 'racial' and/or ethnic background. Situating the films against the history of black British and British Asian cinema prior to 1979, it is argued that the pairing of issues of 'race' and ethnicity with the image of youth has, in fact, long been a feature of British cinema. Moreover, whilst there is pronounced diversity in terms of issues, themes, character types, plot devices, narrative arcs, and form and style, clear patterns emerge when the films are divided into black British males 1980s and 1990s, black British males 2000s and 2010s, British Asian males, Jewish British males, other minority ethnic males, black British females, and British Asian females.

Black British and British Asian Cinema⁷⁰

As outlined by Ann Ogidi's BFI Screenonline entry for 'Black British Film', whilst 'Africa was used from the early days of cinema as a location for love stories and melodramas', '[t]he first British films to portray Black people were "actuality" films and travelogues', and it was only really from the 1930s onwards that Britain started to make films which were set in Britain and featured black actors in lead roles. Furthermore, as stated in a UK Film Council report, '[b]etween the mid-1940s and mid-1970s, films addressing race issues in Britain were rare, while television manifested an incremental interest in them, largely through investigative programmes' (Narval Media/Birkbeck College/Media Consulting Group 2009: 50). Indeed, a general consensus amongst scholars

⁷⁰ In the same way that there is no universal agreement as to what 'British cinema' is, there is no common consensus as to what the labels 'black British cinema' and 'British Asian cinema' denote. As Korte and Sternberg discuss, the 'blackness' of a film may be tied to the 'race'/ethnicity of those involved in its making and/or the characters in it and/or its target audience (2004: 34-35). For example, Malik uses the term 'Black British films' 'to refer to all ... films which draw on the manifold experiences of, and which, for the most part are made by film-makers drawn from the Asian, African and Caribbean diaspora', and employs 'the working definition British-Asian film to refer to those films which deal specifically with the British-Asian experience or are made by those who descend from the Indian sub-continent' (1996: 2003).

writing about 'race'⁷¹ and ethnicity⁷² in British cinema is that although some pre-1970s films explored cross-cultural encounters and dilemmas in meaningful ways, others dealt simply in tokenism and cliché. For example, as the UK Film Council report details, the few films that did incorporate matters of 'race' and ethnicity 'tended to mix their concern with social problems with thriller story dynamics' (Narval Media/Birkbeck College/Media Consulting Group 2009: 50) and were 'quintessentially about Britain's white majority encountering the reality of black immigration and exploring its own fears, ... not the black immigrant experience' (Narval Media/Birkbeck College/Media Consulting Group 2009: 52).

Analogously, in his examination of the social problem film of the British New Wave 1959-1963, John Hill argues that *Sapphire* (1959), *Flame in the Street* (1961) and *The Wind of Change* (1961) are not as progressive as their creators likely intended them to be – the first two titles certainly examining 'racism' but, in using the figure of an "unfulfilled woman" (Dyer 1977: 7 cited in Hill 1986: 88) as the voice of prejudice, failing to address its manifestation on a wider scale; and the first and third titles unhelpfully 'endors[ing] an ideology of blacks as "naturally" more vital, more rhythmic and more sexual' (1986: 88).

Following on from this, whilst the UK Film Council report highlights *Leo the Last* (1970) for representing a 'sharp break from the social problem film' (Narval Media/Birkbeck College/Media Consulting Group 2009: 53), and Barbara Korte and Claudia Sternberg draw attention to a 'multitude of short films which have been made by black and Asian film-makers since the 1960s' (2004: 51) – honing in on *Ten Bob in Winter* (1963) and *Jemima and Johnny* (1964) – it is essential to note that, in terms of feature films, it is the decade whose end marks the beginning of my chosen period of study which saw a small number of 'breakthrough' (Ogidi) titles exploring black British or British Asian lives, namely, *A Private Enterprise* (1974), *Pressure* (1975) and *Black Joy* (1977). More specifically, as Michael Brooke observes for BFI Screenonline: 'Shot on a tiny budget for the British Film Institute, *A Private Enterprise* (1974) was the first British film to portray the lives and concerns of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent'. Likewise, *Pressure* (1975) – written by Trinidad-born Horace Ové and Samuel Selvon, directed by Ové, and also funded by the BFI – 'is commonly acknowledged as Britain's first full-length black feature' (Korte and Sternberg 2004: 57). And

⁷¹ I am sceptical of scientific theories of 'race', concurring with UNESCO's 1978 Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice: 'All human beings belong to a single species and are descended from a common stock. They are born equal in dignity and rights and all form an integral part of humanity' (Giddens and Sutton 2013: 676). As John Storey states, 'The first thing to insist on in discussions of "race" is that there is just one "race", the human race. Human biology does not divide people into different "races"' (2015: 175). And as Paul Gilroy asserts, "'Race" has to be socially and politically constructed and elaborate ideological work is done to secure and maintain the different forms of "racialization"' (2002: 35 cited in Storey 2015: 176). That is, 'human beings come in different colours and with different physical features, but ... these differences do not issue meanings; they have to be made to mean' (Storey 2015: 175). Nevertheless, as Anthony Giddens and Philip W. Sutton claim, "'race" still has meaning for many people, even though its scientific basis has been discredited. Hence, it remains a vital, if highly contested concept' (2013: 676). Accordingly, I utilise the concept of 'race', but always place the words 'race', 'racism', 'racist', 'racial', etc. in inverted commas.

⁷² I 'favour the concept of "ethnicity" over "race" because it carries no inaccurate fixed biological reference', denoting, instead, socially and culturally-constructed characteristics, such as 'language, history or ancestry (real or imagined), religion, and styles of dress or adornment' (Giddens and Sutton 2013: 677).

similarly, Ogidi maintains that *Black Joy* (1977) 'continued the task of describing the realities of life for a British-born generation' of black people. Indeed, the 1970s was 'the decade in which the first generation of British-born blacks and Asians was reaching adolescence and early adulthood' and 'a sensitive phase in British immigration policy' (Korte and Sternberg 2004: 155), and these films are explicit and nuanced in their responses to such developments.

Further to this, it was only with the arrival of a 'new ... model of feature film commissioning, based on partnership with television', that there came to be 'cultural visibility' for 'a rising number of films by black and Asian people' (Narval Media/Birkbeck College/Media Consulting Group 2009: 6), about the black British and British Asian experience – Channel 4 proving to be instrumental in the process:

'With its mandate as a publisher-broadcaster, Channel 4 has been a pivotal force in British cinema since the early 1980s, making possible a substantial number of black and Asian films about every aspect of life in a Britain which has gradually been re-defined by cultural and ethnic hybridity. A deliberate policy of looking to reflect a broad spectrum of cultural experience, combined with founder Jeremy Isaacs' belief in the role of the channel as a new cradle for British authored cinema, resulted in the first black and Asian films to cross over and achieve a measure of popular success' (Narval Media/Birkbeck College/Media Consulting Group 2009: 56).

In addition, it was not until the establishment of 'black workshops ... in the wake of the 1981 riots' (Hill 1999: 219) – principally, Black Audio Film Collective, Sanofka Film and Video Collective, and Ceddo Film and Video workshop, which were franchised under the Workshop Declaration of Channel 4's Department of Independent Film and Video – that there evolved "'a kind of counter practice" which contested the dominant representations of blacks in Britain and also the forms in which these representations were conventionally produced' (Mercer 1988: 8 cited in Hill 1999: 219). For instance, Black Audio Film Collective released *Handsworth Songs* (1986), and Sanofka Film and Video Collective, *The Passion of Remembrance* (1986) and *Looking for Langston* (1988). And crucially, these changes went hand in hand with a honing of terminology used in relation to the cinematic depiction of black British and British Asian lives. The sometimes capitalised adjective 'black' had, hitherto, become 'increasingly accepted within British society', 'used in relation to African, Caribbean and South Asian communities' in order to 'mobilize around a common identity in pushing for change' (Giddens and Sutton 2013: 679), and correspondingly, 'the intellectual or art cinema community had all supported [an] inclusive notion of "'black British cinema"', with a "'debiologised" understanding of what could be identified as "Black"' such that the handle was applicable to all representations of the 'share[d] ... legacy of post-colonial migration to Britain roughly between 1950 and 1965' (Malik 2010: 135). However, the aforementioned designation was rendered somewhat inadequate by the emergence of 'black British cinema' and 'British Asian cinema' as distinct strands of British filmmaking practice in the 1980s, with "'Landmarks"' (Korte and Sternberg 2004: 49) including, on one side, *Babylon* (1980), *Burning an Illusion* (1981) and *Playing Away* (1986), and on the other

side, *Majdhar* (1984), *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987). As Cary Rajinder Sawhney summarises:

'The late 1980s saw changes in public-funding structures as well as a growing emphasis upon multiculturalism. As a result, the "Black Movement" became somewhat depoliticized and fragmented, in line with different cultural constituencies and identities. British black and Asian filmmakers such as Gurinder Chadha, Isaac Julien, John Akomfrah, Udayan Prasad, and Julien Henriques began to produce increasingly commercial works, less focused on challenging racism or coming to terms with cultural displacement and more concerned with depicting a vibrant and diverse British black and Asian experience, as well as exploring mainstream themes. Producer Parminder Vir recalls that this period provided "an opportunity for telling stories of where we are now rather than being defined by our ethnicities"' (2014: 58-59).

Indeed, as Tariq Modood (1994) posits, "'black" ... was used too loosely and overemphasized oppression based on skin colour, implying an essential identity which does not exist in people's real experience' (Giddens and Sutton 2013: 679). Likewise, Stuart Hall's idea of 'new ethnicities' (2006) was influential, acknowledging the importance of the reclamation of 'black' as 'the first stage in a cultural politics of resistance', but accepting its potential for the perpetuation of the polarisation of 'black' and 'white', and claiming that 'a second stage ... beginning in the mid-1980s' (Giddens and Sutton 2013: 679) brought the disappearance of 'the innocent notion of the essential black subject' (Hall 2006: 200):

'[S]ome of the most exciting cultural work is being done in England. Third generation young Black men and women know they come from the Caribbean, know that they are Black, know that they are British. They want to speak from all three identities. They are not prepared to give up any one of them. They will contest the Thatcherite notion of Englishness, because they say this Englishness is Black. They will contest the notion of Blackness because they want to make a differentiation between people who are Black from one kind of society and people who are Black from another. Because they need to know that difference, that difference that makes a difference in how they write their poetry, make their films, how they paint. It makes a difference. It is inscribed in their creative work. They need it as a resource. They are all those identities together. They are making astonishing cultural work, the most important work in the visual arts. Some of the most important work in film and photography and nearly all the most important work in popular music is coming from this new recognition of identity that I am speaking about' (Hall 1997: 59).

As Hall states, 'migration has turned out to be *the* world-historical event of late modernity' (1996: 490 cited in Hill 1999: 223), and as Sarita Malik opines, '[w]ith regard to migrant and diasporic cinema as an example of "hybrid" cultural production, it is Britain that has set an important benchmark for the rest of Europe' (2010: 132).

Disappointingly, however, in spite of such a clear recognition of plurality, subsequent decades present an arguably less progressive picture. The UK Film Council report may be correct to assert that '[f]ilm has helped to articulate the voice and image of UK minority ethnic communities, especially black and Asian, creating some of the most eloquent accounts of the immigrant experience and of how conflict can be replaced by community' (Narval Media/Birkbeck College/Media Consulting Group 2009: 9), but according to the BFI's section on 'Diversity' on their website, there is still work to be done, both on and off-screen:

‘When Steve McQueen picked up an Academy Award for *12 Years a Slave* in 2013, he became the first black director to win the Oscar for Best Picture. This was a seminal moment for black filmmakers and a recognition of one of our most talented artists. However, the statistics across the industry tell a different story – just 5.3% of the film production workforce, 3.4% of the film distribution workforce and 4.5% of the film exhibition workforce were from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds in 2012. ...

‘Portrayal of under-represented groups can also be inauthentic. 40% of the general public said that characters from ethnic minorities are too often represented in films in a tokenistic way. This rose to ... 69% in the Asian community and 76% in the Black African and Caribbean community. ...

‘The picture of inequality among the workforce is bleak when looking at senior positions; even fewer people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds (BAME), women and people with disabilities are employed in senior positions. What’s harder to quantify is the effect that peoples’ [sic] background plays in how successful they are in film, but anecdotal observations suggest that class is a strong factor affecting people’s engagement with film and progression within the film industry.’

Moreover, as Malik opines, ‘since the late 1990s a new politics of uniformity has arisen’ (2010: 134) – on the one hand, ‘a proliferation of low-budget “urban youth films”’ (2010: 144), ‘primarily pitched and sold as “black films”’ (2010: 142), and centring upon ‘delinquency’, ““hoodies”’, ‘gang culture’, and ‘gun and knife crime’ (2010: 142-144); and on the other hand, depictions of British Asian life which commonly adopt the ‘sanitised conventions’ (2010: 134) of ‘social comedy, inter-ethnic romance [and] Bollywood-style melodrama’ (2010: 133). In other words, although ‘this multiple condition appears to support post-colonial notions of hybridity (based around untenability and anti-essentialism)’, ‘these cinemas appear to be producing their own kinds of essentialism and are therefore vulnerable to the homogenising forces which hybridity is presumed to subvert’ (Malik 2010: 133).

The Pairing of Issues of ‘Race’ and Ethnicity with the Image of Youth

Against this backdrop, I would like to suggest that an underappreciated aspect of British cinema is its frequent pairing of issues of ‘race’ and ethnicity with the image of youth. To begin with, as cited in Chapter Two and earlier, the social problem film of the British New Wave 1959-1963 centred on ‘topics such as juvenile delinquency, prostitution, homosexuality and *race* [my emphasis]’ and ‘[t]he problem of youth was well ahead in this respect, giving rise to such titles as *The Blue Lamp* (1950), [et al.]’ (1986: 67). For example, in the aforementioned *Sapphire* (1959), *Flame in the Street* (1961) and *The Wind of Change* (1961): *Sapphire* is the murdered mixed-‘race’ – specifically, black and white – girlfriend of a young man whose sister turns out to be the murderer; Kathie (Sylvia Syms) is a young white British woman whose parents disapprove of her relationship with a young man of West Indian heritage; and Frank (Johnny Briggs) is a white British teenage boy who helps to beat up a young black man and his white girlfriend, only to later discover that the girl that he helped to attack is his own sister. Similarly, the aforementioned short films *Ten Bob in*

Winter (1963) and *Jemima and Johnny* (1964) follow, respectively, a West Indian student, and the friendship between a child from a Caribbean family background (Jemima) and a child of a white nationalist (Johnny). Likewise, the aforementioned *Pressure* (1975) – which ‘has been an important reference for a subsequent generation of black filmmakers’, ‘features in almost every retrospective of black British cinema’, and ‘is regarded as pivotal in academic literature on black British cinema’ (Narval Media/Birkbeck College/Media Consulting Group 2009: 55) – continues the association of ‘race’ with youth by focusing in on Tony (Herbert Norville), ‘a young black British-born school-leaver in London’ (Korte and Sternberg 2004: 57), with the ‘pressure’ of the title denoting the way in which he is torn between different people and various concerns as he grows up:

‘white employers disregard his qualifications and turn him down or offer only menial work; his white schoolmates, who have found employment, can now afford a more generous life-style; his mother – wishing him to succeed in Britain – refuses to accept that discriminatory practices account for her son’s failure to find work; unemployed black friends, fighting boredom and poverty, involve him in a shoplifting spree; [and] his older Caribbean-born brother, Colin, urges him to participate in the black-power movement, a political activity which their [Trinidadian-born] parents strongly oppose’ (Korte and Sternberg 2004: 57).

Indeed, as noted in the aforementioned UK Film Council report: ‘Most critics were positive [about *Pressure* (1975)], stressing its courage in handling race relations from the perspective of black youth’ (Narval Media/Birkbeck College/Media Consulting Group 2009: 55). Moreover, Korte and Sternberg conclude that it ‘relates the *coming-of-age* of a black person in Britain [my emphasis]’, with a ‘focus ... on social exclusion ... and on family structures and values’ (2005: 60), and identify it as a watershed in British cinema history, arguing that the subject matter of ‘a central character belonging to the younger generation’ and their ‘dealings with family members, particularly parents, will remain a standard starting-point for many films to come’ (2004: 60). Thus they inadvertently point to the significant number of contemporary British coming-of-age films which revolve around a first, second or third-generation immigrant, or a pair or group of second or third-generation immigrants – namely, *Babylon* (1980), *Burning an Illusion* (1981), *R.H.I.N.O.* (1983), *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), *The Fruit Machine* (1988), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), *Wild West* (1992), *Babymother* (1998), *East is East* (1999), *Rage* (1999), *Wondrous Oblivion* (2001), *Anita and Me* (2002), *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), *Bullet Boy* (2004), *Bradford Riots* (2006), *Kidulthood* (2006), *Sixty Six* (2006), *Adulthood* (2008), *Somers Town* (2008), *Shank* (2009), *Shank* (2010), *Anuvahood* (2011), *Attack the Block* (2011), *Everywhere and Nowhere* (2011), *Wuthering Heights* (2011), *My Brother the Devil* (2012), *Sixteen* (2013) and *Belle* (2014). In the same way that Hill asserts of British cinema of the 1980s that it became ‘increasingly rare to find the working-class hero as the central protagonist, with his place increasingly being taken by working-class women, gays, blacks, and Asians’ (1999: 135), it is arguable that the coming-of-age film has proved a popular vehicle for a progressively inclusive – if not necessarily progressive – approach to the representation of minority ‘racial’ and ethnic groups in British cinema, especially in the 2000s and 2010s.

As detailed in Chapter Two, Berghahn is keen to detail the wider European context of this development, drawing attention to ‘a surge of European films featuring the identity struggles of adolescents from ethnic minority backgrounds’ (2010: 235), which she traces back to the mid-1980s and groups under the label ‘diasporic coming-of-age films’ (2010: 246). Highlighting the role of parents and peers in the transition from childhood to adulthood, calling them ‘the two most significant poles in [the] process’ (2010: 241), she theorises that the former usually embody the culture in which they were raised, the latter typically represent ‘liberal Western culture’ (2010: 250), and the differences between the two create a sense of divided loyalty in the adolescent protagonist, forcing them to prioritise or, even, ultimately choose one particular ‘cultural affiliation’ (2010: 251) over another. Indeed, she goes so far as to posit that:

‘What distinguishes coming-of-age films set in a multicultural milieu from those set in a milieu in which race and ethnicity are normalised – and thus invisible and, presumably, socially irrelevant – is that they revolve around their protagonists’ search for ethnic and cultural belonging. They frequently centre on pivotal moments in which the adolescent protagonist makes a choice between two cultures that will determine his or her adult identity. It is this pivotal moment that empowers the protagonist to move on to new shores at the end’ (2010: 240).

Notably, too, Berghahn grounds her formulation in Paul Gilroy’s distinction between a ‘location of residence’ and a ‘location of belonging’ (Gilroy 1993), which are allegedly ‘identical’ for second or third-generation immigrants, but not for their ‘parents, who experience a profound tension between these two locations and who usually wish to preserve their cultural traditions (religion, customs and language) in the location of residence’, meaning that ‘the two generations tend to be out of sync with regard to cultural assimilation’ (Berghahn 2010: 241).

However, whilst Gilroy’s and Berghahn’s parallel perspectives provide a useful starting point for examining cultural and generational conflict in the films at hand, it is not always the case that family life and life outside of the family home are drawn as opposing forces, and that ‘the adolescent’s maturation is equated with the dominant cultural affiliation he or she makes’ (Berghahn 2010: 251). Moreover, the degree to which matters of ‘race’ and ethnicity are shown to shape a protagonist’s coming-of-age process varies significantly from film to film, with some, for instance, spelling out from which diaspora a protagonist hails and/or whether they are a first, second or third-generation immigrant, some tackling cultural acclimatisation, some exploring cross-cultural encounters, some probing cross-cultural dilemmas, some dealing with ‘racism’ and xenophobia, and some – crucially – complicating, downplaying or sidestepping one or more of these concerns. As Berghahn acknowledges, Hall’s emphasis upon plurality is instructive:

‘The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of “identity” which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly

producing and reproducing themselves anew through transformation and difference' (2005: 244 cited in Berghahn 2010: 246).

That is, constructing generalisations about the nature of diasporas is problematic and, therefore, artistic representations of diasporas should ideally reflect their complexity.

Black British Males: 1980s and 1990s

Following in the footsteps of the first British feature film to revolve around a black adolescent male protagonist – the aforementioned *Pressure* (1975) – *Babylon* (1980), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) and *Rage* (1999) are also set in London (respectively, Deptford and Brixton, Hackney, and Peckham) and

'centre on ... individuals who are caught up in the "social condition" of youth, which may include[:] "unwilling economic dependence on parents and parental homes; uncertainty regarding future planning; powerlessness and lack of control over immediate circumstances of life; feelings of symbolic as well as material marginality to the main society; [and] imposed institutional and ideological constructions of *youth* which privilege certain readings and definitions of what young people should do, feel or be" (Willis et al. 1990: 12-13)' (Korte and Sternberg 2004: 97).

However, whilst *Pressure* (1975) juxtaposes its protagonist's home life with his experiences of wider British society as he endeavours to secure post-school employment – setting his parents' advice to try to integrate, against his older brother's militancy and disillusionment after having 'already undergone the frustrating process of job-seeking' (Korte and Sternberg 2004: 58) – *Babylon* (1980), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) and *Rage* (1999) feature 'young people trying to construct and affirm their individual and group identities by way of making, performing or presenting music collectively' (Korte and Sternberg 2004: 96-97), with each title providing 'its own elaborate variation of the black youth and music paradigm' (Korte and Sternberg 2004: 99).

Babylon (1980), to begin with, is 'one of the first mainstream films to draw attention to the new black "subculture" emerging in Britain at the time' (Bourne 2001: 201), especially a new generation of sound systems emphasising the MCs and singers grouped around the microphone':

'The film contains a range of musical styles, from reggae, popular tunes, rhythmical drums to Rastafarian sing-song, blues, church songs, and many are presented as intradiegetic sounds, including the singers and musicians. Various sound systems were involved in making the film (Jah Shaka, for example, played himself); special music was recorded and produced by Dennis Bovell; and various performers, including Aswad, can be heard on the soundtrack which was promoted as an album. Additionally, Aswad group member Brinsley Ford was cast in the role of Blue, the protagonist' (Korte and Sternberg 2004: 62).

However, as Martin Stellman, the film's co-writer and associate producer, stated – in a Q&A at BFI Southbank on 11th September 2008 – in response to the suggestion that there are

parallels with *Quadrophenia* (1979), which he also helped to write: 'It's a kind of movie about growing up, isn't it? And alienation, and all that good rites-of-passage stuff. And it's kind of, in that way, a universal story.' Similarly, Korte and Sternberg observe that 'most of the characters are 'situated on the brink of adulthood', and suggest that their youthfulness in part explains the 'brutalisation of which they ... become both victims and perpetrators', in spite of 'their engagement in symbolic creativity' (2004: 63). Indeed, the coming-of-age story of British Jamaican David/'Blue' is what lies at the heart of *Babylon* (1980) – beginning with him bouncing between a fractious home life, a problematic job at a garage, a troubled relationship with a girlfriend, unpleasant interactions with 'racist' neighbours, and a music scene that he enjoys with his friends; and ending with him being sacked by his exploitative and 'racist' boss, seeking but not finding comfort at a Rastafarian gathering, stabbing a 'racist' neighbour after discovering that the rehearsal space that he and his friends use has been vandalised, and toasting about 'brutality' and 'mortality' and how 'We can't take no more of that. ... You can't fool the youth no more', even as the music venue in which he is performing is raided by police. In summary, made to feel like a financial burden on his family and a bad influence upon his younger brother, Blue tries to forge a conventional career as a mechanic. But when he is laid off for simply insisting that he takes his break, and then finds his personal space violated, an overwhelming sense of disenfranchisement triggers a sudden act of vengeance and culminates in a defiant musical performance. The title of the film is well-deserved, linking Blue's experiences of 'racism', with the way in which reggae artists use the word 'Babylon' in lyrics, song titles, and names of artists and collectives to connect the Babylonian Captivity/Exile, the transatlantic slave trade, and various forms of 'racial' and ethnic oppression in the late twentieth century.

In comparison, *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) revolves around pirate radio soul music DJs Caz (Mo'Nique) and Chris (Valentine Nonyela) – respectively, of black Caribbean, and black Caribbean and white lineage – and is set at the time of the Queen's Silver Jubilee and the Socialist Workers Party counter movement 'Stuff the Jubilee' (Walker 2001: 187). A bold, if somewhat disjointed, depiction of 'a particular moment of black history that complicates the more familiar accounts of the period' (Hill 1999: 237), it presents a narrative that 'juxtaposes rigid, essentialist and stereotyped views with a utopian vision' (Korte and Sternberg 2004: 104) – chiefly, by contrasting examples of the co-existence of black and white, with instances of 'racism', xenophobia and nationalism, but also setting homosexuality alongside homophobia. Discord is exemplified by: a mainstream radio station whose preoccupation with, in the words of one of the executives, a 'recognisable style', explicitly limits diversity of cultural expression; 'racist' police; and the appearance of the National Front at a 'Stuff the Jubilee' concert. Harmony is embodied in: a club which plays both 'black' soul and 'white' punk music; Caz's intimate relationship with a white punk named Billibud (Jason Durr); and a final scene in which Caz, Chris, Billibud, a black female friend and a white female friend dance in synchrony to El Coco's soul anthem *Let's Get It Together* (1976). Thus, *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) is like *Babylon* (1980) in as much that it

foregrounds and entwines music and issues of 'race' and ethnicity, but diverges in the way in which it also interweaves matters of homosexuality by positioning Caz on the receiving end of both 'racism' and homophobia, echoing the dynamics of *My Beautiful Launderette* (1985), as discussed later.

Rage (1999) appears to echo a number of aspects of the black adolescent male experience as portrayed in *Babylon* (1980) and *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), but also seems to offer something new in terms of its handling of such subject matter. Its central protagonist, Jamie/'Rage' (Fraser Ayres), is – like Chris – the offspring of a white mother and a black father. And just as one of Blue's closest friends, Ronnie (Karl Howman), is white, so too is one of Rage's closest friends, Thomas/'T' (John Pickard). Furthermore, in the same way that Blue and his friends listen to and perform reggae, and Chris is an amateur soul DJ who aspires to become a professional radio DJ, so Rage, T and Godwin/'G' (Shaun Parkes) set about making a hip-hop record – with the theft of sound equipment in *Babylon* (1980) paralleled by the burglary in *Rage* (1999). Likewise, where Blue ends up stabbing a 'racist' neighbour, so Rage shows a 'growing penchant for violence', for example, following and knocking down an off-duty policeman who had once stopped him in his car and 'racially' abused him. However, whilst Blue's father constantly scolds him, and neither Caz's nor Chris's fathers are shown or referred to, Rage has two father-figures, of sorts, who 'offer ... different paths or possibilities of empowerment' (Korte and Sternberg 2004: 128) – on the one hand, 'a representative of a now old-fashioned Rastafarian tradition of black politics and ganja meditation' (Korte and Sternberg 2004: 127), seventy-year-old Marcus (Shango Baku), and on the other hand, a drug don who would like to recruit him as a dealer, Pin (Wale Ojo). Moreover, unlike Chris, Rage struggles with being mixed 'race', at one point confronting his mother with the question, 'Why didn't you stick to your own kind?' And finally, it is important to note that T is not only white, but also middle class, and that G is an 'upwardly mobile' 'talented jazz and classical pianist, ready and eager to study classical composition and jazz at college in the near future' (Korte and Sternberg 2004: 125), making *Rage* (1999) significant for its refusal to pigeonhole the black music tradition of hip hop as an exclusively black, working-class form of expression: '*Rage* ... was hyped as a violent hip-hop style urban movie. It turned out instead to be a sensitive, downbeat and unglamorous portrayal of two working-class black boys and their middle-class white friend on the threshold of adulthood' (Wambu).

Black British Males: 2000s and 2010s

If representations of black British adolescent males in British cinema of the 1980s and 1990s typically situate the coming-of-age process within traditionally black music scenes in which music is figured as a form of resistance and transcendence from 'racism' and socio-economic disadvantage, the 2000s and 2010s brought the aforementioned 'proliferation of ... "urban youth films"' (Malik 2010: 144) – specifically, *Bullet Boy* (2004), *Kidulthood* (2006),

Adulthood (2008), *Shank* (2009), *Shank* (2010) and *Attack the Block* (2011), in which the majority of the protagonists are black British adolescent males who are, in one way or another, involved in London gang culture. Indeed, 2016 saw *Kidulthood* (2006) and *Adulthood* (2008) remarketed as the first two parts of 'The Hood Trilogy', concluding with *Brotherhood* (2016) – all three films written by and starring Noel Clarke, who also directed the second and third titles. Likewise, the aforementioned UK Film Council report opines that the highly successful *Bullet Boy* (2004) 'sparked the development of a new contemporary sub-genre [of social realism] – the social realist black youth-orientated film – which portrays a dystopian inner city and a youth culture in which drugs, alcohol and crime are a daily staple', citing *Kidulthood* (2006) and *Adulthood* (2008) as further examples (Narval Media/Birkbeck College/Media Consulting Group 2009: 62). In fact, in the 2000s and 2010s, there are only two contemporary British coming-of-age films with black male protagonists to whom gang culture does not apply – *Wuthering Heights* (2011) and *Sixteen* (2013). In *Wuthering Heights* (2011), Heathcliff is, unconventionally, played by black actors (Solomon Glave and James Howson) and referred to, in an embellishment upon the original text, as a 'nigger':

'Natalie Portman and then Abbie Cornish had been lined up by other directors to play Cathy, with Michael Fassbender and *Gossip Girl*'s Ed Westwick on board at various points as Heathcliff. But Arnold favoured authenticity over A-list, and also wanted to square her Heathcliff with Emily Brontë's original. "There are five or six clear descriptions of him in the novel," she explains. "He gets called a *little Lascar*, which meant an Indian seaman, and there's a reference to Chinese-Indian parentage. He also gets called a Gypsy. In the end, I decided that what I wanted to honour was his difference"' (Gilbey 2011).

In *Sixteen* (2013), former child soldier from the Congo, Jumah (Roger Jean Nsengiyumva), tries to build a new life in South London: learning to manage his memories of his past life and rein in his capacity for physical violence; accidentally witnessing the murder of an elderly neighbour by someone that he knows from school, and dealing with an ensuing threat to his safety; pursuing his ambition of becoming a hairdresser; and developing a relationship with a fellow pupil, Chloe (Rosie Day). Hence, on one level, Malik's assessment is correct: 'The growth of what is now popularly termed "urban cinema" ... often depends on popular mythologies of "blackness"', and '[a]t stake here is the persistence of racialisation' (2010: 144-145). In the same way that Alexander details in a report from the Runnymede Trust, 'Re(thinking) "Gangs"' (Samota 2008), how '[m]edia sensationalism contributes ... to ... the problem of [the] over-representation of young black people in the criminal justice system' (2008: 2), it may be argued that *Bullet Boy* (2004) et al. help to generate a moral panic about black, particularly male, youth – an unfortunate echo of the aforementioned social problem film.

Nevertheless, it is also worth highlighting the way in which *Bullet Boy* (2004) and *Kidulthood* (2006) have been praised for their veracity. For instance, journalist Akin Ojumu's calls *Bullet Boy* (2004) an 'authentic depiction' (2005) – thereby endorsing the 'workshop

technique' that was used 'to achieve cultural impact among young viewers, black and white, by credibly rendering their lifestyles, mannerisms and vocabulary' (Narval Media/Birkbeck College/Media Consulting Group 2009: 62). And in contrast to an outcry of protest from some quarters who judge *Kidulthood* (2006) to be irresponsibly pessimistic, sensationalist and voyeuristic in its portrayal of violent, lustful, drug-taking youth, journalist Miranda Sawyer, in her review entitled 'The Film that Speaks to Britain's Youth in Words they Understand', calls it 'a refreshing, energetic, modern movie that documents urban teenagers' lives with wit and vigour', and asserts that whilst it 'examines every current teenage media cliché you'd care to name, from hoodies to unwanted pregnancy', '[w]hat's different is that it deals with them all from the teenagers' point of view' (2006). Similarly, credibility is a quality that prompts journalist Imran Amrani to laud 'The Hood Trilogy' as a significant achievement in the landscape of British cinema:

'When *Kidulthood* came out in 2006, I was 15 years old and it felt like a defining moment. Other cities had their representation of youth culture just over a decade earlier before, in 1995. In Paris it was *La Haine* and in New York it was *Kids*. Before that, *Boyz in the Hood* [1991] and *Menace II Society* [1993] had paved the way for raw and gritty films that dealt with violence, social issues and navigating the road to adulthood. ... *Kidulthood* was special because it was the first film I felt was made for an audience like me. It was urgent and relevant because it dealt with a world that is so often underrepresented and misunderstood. With no contrived heroes, the characters felt familiar and convincing, concerned with video games, sex and the choices that could change their lives forever. ... When *Adulthood* was released two years later, I was eager to see what was next. As the title suggested, it was darker and more grown up. ... Often writers for TV and film don't do a very convincing job of recreating the language that young people use. Clarke changed that. This was something he continued in *Brotherhood* [2016] ... Over time I've realised that it's been important for me to follow the actors in the film even more than the characters themselves. Seeing someone like Clarke write a film with such a diverse cast has been inspirational. Now I'm a bit older I am more aware of what kinds of challenges minorities face in film, entertainment and media. I have respect for what this trilogy has achieved' (2016).

Further to this, it is essential to point out that not all contemporary British coming-of-age films focusing on the relationship between urban youth and gang culture revolve around black protagonists, with key exceptions including *Quadrophenia* (1979), *Small Faces* (1996), *Green Street* (2005), *This is England* (2006), *Awaydays* (2009), *The Firm* (2009), *Neds* (2010), *Anuvahood* (2011) and *My Brother the Devil* (2012) – the parodic *Anuvahood* (2011), in particular, standing out for the way that it subverts audience expectations by giving Kenneth white parents, even though he is not white⁷³, and making one of his 'crew' a middle-class Spanish exchange student. Moreover, it is vital to recognise the varied and equivocal approach to gang culture in *Bullet Boy* (2004) et al., with reluctance, repentance, vulnerability and, even, heroism framed as intrinsic to the various protagonists' growth. For example, although he comes to be murdered when he makes the mistake of agreeing to help a friend with a supposed last act of vengeance, Ricky (Ashley Walters) of *Bullet Boy* (2004), when released from a Young Offenders Institution, returns home determined to

⁷³ The actor, Adam Deacon, was born to an English mother and Moroccan father.

both disassociate himself from the gang rivalry that led to his incarceration and dissuade his younger brother, Curtis (Luke Fraser), from following suit. Trevor/‘Trife’ (Aml Ameen) of *Kidulthood* (2006) is originally drawn to his Uncle Curtis’s (Cornell John) gang but, following an initiation in which he reluctantly slashes someone’s face, and the revelation that he is going to be a father, vows to pursue a different path by promising to settle down with the mother of his child, only to then be killed by another one of the black adolescent male protagonists, Sam (Noel Clarke). Sam, as the central protagonist of *Adulthood* (2008), tries to distance himself from his past mistakes when he comes out of jail for murdering Trife, but is pursued by those seeking revenge. Cal (Wayne Virgo) of *Shank* (2009) grows increasingly uncomfortable about being part of a gang – in the main, because it compels him to hide his homosexuality – and, after developing an intimate relationship with a French student, leading to a violent confrontation with the rest of the gang, eventually leaves. Rager (Ashley Bashy Thomas) and Junior (Kedar Williams-Stirling) of *Shank* (2010) belong to a gang called The Paper Chaserz, a gang of five males who subsist on the streets of a dystopian 2015 Britain by stealing and selling ‘munchies’ (food), and avoiding violent disputes with other gangs, with the long-term plan of ‘mov[ing] out to the wilds’. And whilst Moses (John Boyega) of *Attack the Block* (2011) is the natural leader of a gang of five, only one of whom is not black, and who are first shown mugging a white woman, reference is made to the unfair treatment of black adolescent males at the hands of the police, with Moses going so far as to speculate that the killer aliens that are attacking South London have been deployed by the state:

‘The government probably bred those creatures to kill black boys. First they sent drugs to The Ends [a nickname for the part of Brixton that the story is set in]. Then they sent guns. Now they sent monsters to get us. They don’t care, man. We ain’t killing each other fast enough, so they decided to speed up the process.’

In fact, in keeping with its parodic approach to the ‘urban youth film’, *Attack the Block* (2011) turns on its head the popular conception of the black adolescent male gang member as a scourge on society, with Moses almost singlehandedly saving everybody from the aliens and, consequently, celebrated in the final scene, where he sits locked in the back of a police van, but smiles at the sound of the crowd outside chanting his name in appreciation.

Ergo, if contemporary British coming-of-age films of the 2000s and 2010s routinely place the black adolescent male protagonist either in a gang or around gang culture, the various storylines display a propensity to complicate the pairing by not only revealing him to be ill at ease with his situation and intent upon moving away from the scene, but essentially equating his maturation with these feelings and this direction of travel. Importantly, too, although John Fitzgerald chooses, in his chapter entitled ‘Existing Identities – Reflecting Black and Asian Britain in the Noughties’, to characterise the contents of *Bullet Boy* (2004) and *Kidulthood* (2006) as, respectively, moral and immoral/amoral, there is a didactic quality that unites *Bullet Boy* (2004), *Kidulthood* (2006) and *Shank* (2010), with the efforts of those protagonists seeking to extricate themselves from a lifestyle in which physical violence and

vengeance is normalised shown to be too little, too late. Thus it may be posited that a critical feature of contemporary British coming-of-age films with black male protagonists is that gang culture is never cast as a vehicle for successful individualisation and socialisation. Rather, it is depicted as a source of blockage and, therefore, on balance, presents more of a challenge to the aforementioned moral panic, than a validation of it.

British Asian Males

Whilst contemporary British coming-of-age films revolving around black British males show a propensity to, in the 1980s and 1990s, associate their protagonists with traditionally black music scenes, and in the 2000s and 2010s, situate their protagonists in or around urban gang culture, contemporary British coming-of-age films centring upon British Asian males are, generally speaking, marked by three main features: the portrayal of protagonists whose lifestyle choices (interests, chosen career path, choice of partner, choice of friends, etc.) are set against the expectations of their families; the inclusion of authoritative older male characters, usually in the form of fathers, uncles and brothers; and the construction of protagonists with 'non-essentialised identities' (Korte and Sternberg 2004: 140). As detailed in this section, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), *Wild West* (1992) and *East is East* (1999) may be said to lay down the marker in this regard, and *Bradford Riots* (2006) and *Everywhere and Nowhere* (2011), to follow suit.

To start with, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) – which has already been discussed extensively by, for instance, Hill (1999), Korte and Sternberg (2004), and Christine Geraghty (2005) – is 'widely regarded as a milestone in the representation of race issues' (Narval Media/Birkbeck College/Media Consulting Group: 50), constituting a decisive rejection of 'the burden of representation' (Mercer 1988: 8 cited in Hill 1999: 210), and crossing, 'with great sensitivity and humour' (Williams 2010: 210), matters of 'race' and ethnicity, with issues of class, gender, nationality and sexuality. Indeed, as Malik posits, this particular production from Working Title/SAF Productions, for Channel 4, broke new ground for Asian-British cinema, which was 'culturally marginalized (both critically and institutionally) within an already culturally marginalized Black British film scene' (1996: 214), and correspondingly, Geraghty asserts that it 'made possible' (2005: 78) *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), *East is East* (1999) and *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002). Furthermore, 2008 saw it become 'the only video to be listed by the British Council's Ethnicity Bibliography, next to books on race relations and post-colonial studies' (Narval Media/Birkbeck College/Media Consulting Group 2009: 57).

Nevertheless, strangely ignored in scholarly responses to *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) is the fact that it is Omar's and, to an extent, Johnny's coming-of-age story. Significantly, film critic Chuck Bowen opines that the film, although set in South London, 'curiously resembles the sort of coming-of-age comedy popular in the United States at the

same time, which follows a smarmy upstart teen as he invests himself gleefully in the corruption of the adult world', linking the film's engagement with Thatcherism, with 'the Reaganomics culture that seasoned th[e] yuppie satires' (2015) of *Risky Business* (1983) and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986). However, he does not develop this idea, and whilst scholarship on *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) typically draws attention to the complex characterisation of Omar as a mixed-'race' son of an ailing left-wing former journalist, who is tasked with refurbishing and running a laundrette by his entrepreneurial uncle, and expected to marry a female of Pakistani heritage but deeply attracted to white British Johnny, it invariably fails to identify these various elements as conventions of the coming-of-age genre. That is, in exploring the protagonists' emerging sexuality, framing the protagonists' growth within the development of their careers, pitting the younger generation and the older generation against each other, and intersecting issues of class, 'race' and ethnicity, and sexual orientation, in ways that position the protagonists as a 'symbolic concentrate' (Moretti 2000: 185) of social and cultural tensions, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) constitutes an exemplary coming-of-age film.

In comparison, *Wild West* (1992) has a protagonist who is also hard to pigeonhole, with Southall-based Safed/'Zaf' Ayub (Naveen Andrews) drawn as a Muslim Pakistani Briton who, firstly, exudes a passion for a type of music that, in contrast to the scenes favoured by the black British adolescent male protagonists of the 1980s and 1990s, has neither British nor Asian roots, and secondly, possesses a penchant for anti-authoritarian behaviour that seems difficult to justify, even in light of the 'racism' that he suffers. In contrast to Omar, Zaf is practically devoid of any motivation to commit to any kind of regular job, despite the efforts of his business-minded relatives to encourage him into certain jobs that will help him to assist his mother financially. However, his enthusiasm for country and western is genuine and intense, and leading an all-male, all-British-Pakistani band called the Honkytonk Cowboys, to which he, pivotally, recruits a British Asian woman called Rifat (Sarita Choudhury), he and his fellow musicians put on a well-received performance in an Irish pub, and then record a demo tape and meet some American producers. Moreover, although the band are told that they are not marketable in America because their 'look' is not 'mainstream', and that the only member who may be sellable is Rifat, they eventually take a trip to Nashville.

In the wake of *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *Wild West* (1992), the next British film with British Asian adolescent male protagonists, *East is East* (1999), is a distinctly mainstream affair – produced by Assassin Films for Film4, and in association with the BBC; marketed, typically, as a 'comedy' or 'comedy-drama'; and remarkable for bringing in £10.3 million at the British box office alone (Vir 2001: 5 cited in Korte and Sternberg 2004: 9), when it cost only £1.9 million to make (Walker 2005: 301). Set in 1971 Salford, Greater Manchester, in the wake of Enoch Powell's infamous 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech, and 'drawn quite heavily' from the 'life experiences' (Young 2011) of playwright and screenwriter Ayub Khan-Din, the film follows the children of George and Ella Khan (Om Puri

and Linda Bassett), a Pakistani Muslim father and a white British Roman Catholic mother, positioning Nazir/'Nigel' (Ian Aspinall), Abdul/'Arthur' (Raji James), Tariq/'Tony' (Jimi Mistry), Maneer/'Ghandi' (Emil Marwa), Saleem/'Picasso' (Chris Bisson), Meenah (Archie Panjabi), who is the only daughter, and Sajid/'Spaz' (Jordan Routledge) between the observance of certain conservative cultural practices and the values of a comparatively liberal society – their acts of rebellion ranging from eating sausages and bacon in secret, to escaping arranged marriages, and tensions culminating in them standing up to their father when his anger at a failed attempt to marry off two of the boys leads him to insult and physically attack their mother. As Malik(2010), Korte and Sternberg (2004), Eddie Dyja (2010) and Berghahn (2013) concur, the film 'is overtly predicated on the narrative formula of a classic "between two cultures" discourse' – with 'tyranny and opposition ... specifically and explicitly located within the context of Islam and patriarchy ... [and] represented by George' and 'freedom and tolerance ... seen to lie with George's long-suffering wife, Ella, and the "Western" way of life' (Malik 2010: 144).

However, although the imposing figure of George Khan has, quite rightly, received a great deal of scholarly attention, what has been discussed far less is the range of ways in which the various adolescent protagonists reconcile or, indeed, fail to reconcile the demands of an overly strict Muslim father and the western liberal approach of their mother. Nazir et al. may ultimately side with their mother over their father and, therefore, more generally, with western liberalism over eastern conservatism, but the individual coping mechanisms of the children are worth detailing for their further illumination of the aforementioned "'between two cultures" discourse' (Malik 2010: 144). Indeed, the centrality of the siblings to the narrative is signalled by the choice to open and close with sequences in which they are the focus. The beginning shows 'a Whitsun Procession in which the Khan children (though secular) cheerfully participate, carrying a crucifix and other religious effigies amidst a crowd of white British Catholics' (Berghahn 2013: 135), temporarily ducking out when their mother warns them of their father's proximity. The end shows them hanging around their front doorstep, discernibly freer to mingle with their white British neighbours than at the start, as symbolised by the open front door.

More specifically, Nazir is first seen fleeing his own wedding ceremony, and is then pictured in Eccles, where he has become a hat designer and settled down with a French man, leading his father to remove his portrait from the gallery of family photos in the living room. And later, when Tariq, Saleem and Meenah find Nazir and ask to stay with him, although his initial response is to drive them back home, accompanied by his white lover, with the intention of putting his father in his place, he – significantly – ends up capitulating to his mother's request to leave her to deal with the situation, accentuating how difficult it can be to grow up as a person of dual ethnic heritage. Further to this, as cited earlier, Abdul and Tariq rebel against their father's plans to marry them off to the twin daughters of a British Pakistani businessman from Bradford – the older of the two, Abdul, a little cautious in his resistance, but the more westernised of the two, Tariq, shown to be in a relationship

with a white British girl called Stella Moorhouse (Emma Rydal), and given especially bold lines such as: 'We could have a whip-round and get Dad repatriated', which we quips as he, Saleem and Meenah watch Powell on the television; 'Dad, I'm not Pakistani. I was born here. I speak English, not Urdu'; and, most controversially, 'I'm not marrying a fucking Paki.' Meanwhile, Saleem, who is an art student at college, daringly bases a sculpture of a woman's nether regions on Stella's friend, Peggy (Ruth Jones), and it accidentally ends up in the lap of the mother of the aforementioned twins, much to the horror of both sets of parents. And on a similarly comic note, the sculpture is last seen in the hands of Sajid, whose amusement and puzzlement at it highlights his relative innocence, and is a humorous riff upon his earlier ordeal of being circumcised according to Islamic tradition. Indeed, it is only Maneer who embraces his Muslim heritage by actively practising the Islamic faith and, crucially, even he comes to demonstrate that he will never accept his father's somewhat perverse insistence upon certain Muslim traditions, openly comforting his mother after his father's attack on her. Moreover, the film's sequel, *West is West* (2010), not only continues its exploration of George and Ella's marriage, but is, essentially, structured around George and Sajid's trip to Pakistan, the aim of which is to educate Sajid about his Pakistani roots after he calls his father a 'Paki', and during which Sajid, George and Maneer undergo life-changing experiences – Sajid turning from an angry teenager into a calmer, more considerate and wiser young man, 'transformed' by the 'gentle and loving tutelage' of 'a charismatic Sufi elder' (Berghahn 2013: 138) called Pir Naseem (Nadim Salawha); George learning to appreciate Ella after his foolish decision to use the family savings to build a new house for his Pakistani wife and daughters results in her flying out to Pakistan to, initially, stop him; and Maneer, who lives with extended family in Pakistan, entering into a marriage with Neelam (Zita Sattar), whom he meets out there, but who turns out to be from Rochdale.

Like *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), *Bradford Riots* (2006) revisits a major event in the history of 'race' relations in Britain and explores it from the perspective of a young male – although this time the protagonist is not only caught up in the action, but has his life course altered by it. Focusing on the rioting that occurred in Bradford, West Yorkshire, on 7th July 2001, as a result of tension between members of a growing British Asian population, the far right, and police, the narrative is ostensibly about the effects of the unrest upon one individual and his family. However, as indicated by the intertitles, the 'drama' is 'based on real events', and representative of a collective experience:

'In the wake of the Bradford riots, 191 people were given custodial sentences totalling more than 510 years. These were the harshest and most widespread sentences for public disorder since the Second World War.'

Indeed, whilst the film should not be regarded as sociological data, it suggests that despite increased equality legislation over the years, there are inherent disadvantages to being British Asian, as opposed to white British, in contemporary Britain.

To be specific, the central protagonist of *Bradford Riots* (2006), second-generation British Pakistani Karim, is initially seen adjusting his appearance, language and behaviour according to whether he is with his university friends, childhood friends, or family, and critically, he is shown to do so with little difficulty. Returning to his family home in Manningham for the summer holidays, he is welcomed back by various childhood friends. Having a white girlfriend at university is a detail that he simply does not share with his family or childhood friends. And although his decision to pursue a degree is a source of familial tension, with his father supportive, but his older brother, who has ended up running the family fabric shop, resentful, the situation is not unmanageable. In fact, Karim's movement between old haunts, such as a pool club and a fast food shop, and the local library, where he is seen working on his dissertation, suggests that he can handle a variety of influences and expectations, as well as pursue his own ambitions. Nevertheless, when the final day of the local mela is cancelled because the National Front are rumoured to be making their presence felt, and then do turn up, in spite of a ban on them marching, Karim finds himself angered by police inaction and, uncharacteristically, joins in with the throwing of stones and bricks at the police. Distressed by the passivity of the police when childhood friend Shahid (Muzz Kahn) is beaten up by the National Front, provoked by childhood friend Aki (Syed Ahmed) asking him 'Whose side are you on – gore [white people] or apne [your kind]?', and ordered by his father to turn himself in, Karim's hybrid identity becomes distinctly fractured. Finally, despite the best efforts of his lawyer, he is sentenced to five years in prison, bringing his university education to a halt, his relationship with his family under strain, and his general well-being and life chances into question.

In a different vein, the coming-of-age narrative of *Everywhere and Nowhere* (2011) may be productively linked with *Babylon* (1980), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), *Wild West* (1992) and *Rage* (1999), as it, too, revolves around the desire to create, share, and generally enjoy music, and positions these activities as acts of resistance to and transcendence from various forms of disenfranchisement. In addition, it shares a handful of features with *Bradford Riots* (2006), in that, like Karim, Ash is a second-generation Pakistani Briton with overbearing older relatives – in this case, an older brother and uncle – and a variety of friends from a range of backgrounds. However, whereas Karim is drawn into 'racial' and ethnic tension within a particular region of Britain, it is the insular attitudes and hypocrisy of family and friends that become intolerable for Ash, leaving him confused about his relationships and general direction, and so unhappy that he appears to, in the closing scene, leave his home and neighbourhood altogether. His sister, for example, is in a relationship with a black British male, but seems incapable of summoning up the courage to introduce him to her family, despite promising to do so. And similarly, one friend of Pakistani heritage, who is dating a white British girl, talks of going ahead with an arranged marriage with a 'pretty' girl in Pakistan because he is compelled by his family to marry a girl of Asian heritage and feels that British Asian girls have 'too much attitude', 'think[ing] that because they've got a couple of A-levels, they're fucking Stephen Hawking or something.' Meanwhile, Ash learns

that another friend of Pakistani heritage, who is gay, has just got married⁷⁴. And it turns out, too, that his older brother is having an affair with the wife of one of his employees, even though he parades himself as a responsible family man. Thus Ash despairs that 'Everyone is living a big fuck-off lie', and wonders, 'Why can't people just be honest about who they are?' Indeed, acutely conscious of how issues of 'race' and ethnicity play a part in his identity as a British citizen living in London, he states, in an opening voiceover:

'My name is Ashiq Khan. My friends call me Ash. To them I'm just another London boy, right? Well, apart from the fact that my parents were born in British-occupied India and by the time they got married and my brother was born it was a country called Pakistan, and when he turned seven they packed their bags and got on a plane to Britain for a better life and settled in London. Ten years later my sister arrived, followed by yours truly. Mum always tells Dad that we're all still Indians, but my passport tells me I'm British, and now they've moved to Lahore for their retirement I'm trying to figure out where that leaves me.'

Notably, by the close of the narrative, the question of 'where that leaves [him]' remains unanswered. Although he is able to fuse his Asian roots and British upbringing when he DJs, mixing Bollywood soundtracks with contemporary electronic music, the reconciliation of differing cultural influences and practices does not translate easily into everyday life. Told by his uncle, on the one hand, that he has 'all the opportunities' that his father's generation 'never ever dreamed of', Ash's response, 'Then you should let us take advantage of them', is met with 'You're young. You need guidance. Perhaps we have spoilt you by giving you everything.' Correspondingly, his aspiration to become a professional DJ is belittled by various members of his family, who expect him to finish his accountancy degree and help his brother run the family-owned grocery store, and his decision to bring his Swedish girlfriend to a family gathering, where he merely introduces her as a 'friend', is greeted with a level of hostility that causes her to walk out. Hence it is no surprise that when asked, at one point, where he is from, he replies, 'Everywhere and fucking nowhere'.

Jewish British Males

Arguably following on from Jack Rosenthal's classic television play *Bar Mitzvah Boy* (1976), *Wondrous Oblivion* (2001) and *Sixty Six* (2006) are both set in 1960s London, respectively, 1960 and 1965/66, and centre upon individual adolescent male protagonists of Jewish heritage, David Wiseman (Sam Smith) and Bernie Reubens (Gregg Sulkin). David is the son of Ruth and Victor (Emily Woof and Stanley Townsend), a woman who, as a young girl, left her native Germany on the *Kindertransport*, and a man of Polish extraction (*Film Education*). Bernie is the son of Esther and Manny (Helena Bonham Carter and Eddie Marsan), both of whom appear to be second-generation Jews. Significantly, neither boy is the victim of anti-Semitism. Furthermore, both of the fathers are endowed with qualities

⁷⁴ To be clear, his marriage is to a woman. Legislation to allow same-sex marriage was not passed in England (and Wales) until July 2013 and did not come into force until March 2014.

which may be said to be stereotypically Jewish – working hard (running a shop) in order to improve their family's lot, and being extremely careful with money and possessions – and these preoccupations are shown to impact upon their sons in terms of setting up an emotional gulf whose closure constitutes a decisive factor in the drama. However, David and Bernie regard the Jewish faith in divergent ways. David is shown performing part of the Torah at home and a Jewish psalm at a Sunday School prize-giving occasion, but is much more interested in cricket, and dismayed by his father's intention to progress from rented accommodation in multicultural South London to home ownership in North London, where there is a substantial Jewish population, including relatives. And in stark contrast, Bernie, already a resident of North London, exhibits great resourcefulness to try to make his bar mitzvah a spectacular event – 'the Jesus Christ of bar mitzvahs,' so he declares – regardless of his parents' lack of enthusiasm for the occasion, and despite it falling on the day of the 1966 World Cup Final, in which England is playing, taking his preparatory lessons very seriously, and even setting up an elaborate planning workshop in the garage. Moreover, whilst *Sixty Six* (2006) utilises a well-known coming-of-age ritual in Jewish culture to structure its tale of adolescent growth, *Wondrous Oblivion* (2001) offers an equally meaningful exploration of the role of 'race' and ethnicity in the development of a British adolescent male of Jewish descent, but without focusing upon his Jewish heritage.

On the one hand, Bernie's story opens with a voiceover and montage that shows that he feels somewhat neglected by his parents, especially his father, and then frames his forthcoming bar mitzvah as an opportunity for 'everyone to really see [him]'. And correspondingly, although the party is a disappointment, the denouement sees his father suddenly drive him to Wembley Stadium to watch the closing stages of the Final – with England, fittingly, beating Germany – bringing about familial harmony and creating an alternative, indeed, more personal rite of passage. By contrast, in David's case, it is not his Jewish background but, rather, his experience of 'racism' towards his new Jamaican neighbours that plays a pivotal role in his development. Set during 'the great wave of West Indian and then later Asian immigration' 'between the Fifties and the Sixties' (Momentum Pictures DVD extra 'Cast and Crew Featurette'), the story sees even David's parents initially discourage him from engaging with the Samuels, and whilst Rosa soon realises her hypocrisy, Victor takes a lot longer to come around. Likewise, despite being coached by Dennis Samuels (Delroy Lindo) and his daughter Judy (Leonie Elliott) in their back garden, and establishing a great friendship with them, David makes the mistake of not inviting Judy to his birthday party, and then turning her away when she knocks on the door, with a gift, during the party. Indeed, David's maturation is inextricably bound up with his relationship with the Samuels and is, accordingly, punctuated by two ensuing sequences in which he redeems himself – firstly, when the Samuels' home is subject to a 'racially'-motivated arson attack one night, and David wakes them up by throwing a cricket ball at Judy's window; and secondly, when he offers a heartfelt apology to Dennis and Judy for not letting Judy attend his birthday celebration, explaining that 'she's too good for [his grammar school

acquaintances], not the other way round'. Further to this, David's transformation is encapsulated in the film's conclusion, where his father sets a good example to his son by coordinating several of the neighbours to rebuild the Samuels' practice cricket net, which had been destroyed in the fire, and David sacrifices a place on the school cricket team, even though they are due to compete in the Junior Challenge Cup, in order to attend, with his parents, a picnic and cricket match organised by the Samuels and some of their friends. Thus *Wondrous Oblivion* (2001) demonstrates that a minority ethnic protagonist's parents and peers are not always positioned as competing influences, and *Sixty Six* (2006) shows that cultural conservatism can come from a minority ethnic protagonist himself, as opposed to his parents – providing key variations upon Berghahn's aforementioned framework for understanding 'diasporic coming-of-age films' (2010: 246).

Other Minority Ethnic Males

Standing alongside the portrayals of black British, British Asian (especially Pakistani), and Jewish British adolescents, *Somers Town* (2008) and *My Brother the Devil* (2012) depict the experiences of adolescent male protagonists who belong to diasporas that are not often represented in contemporary British cinema, following, respectively, Marek (Piotr Jagiello), a first-generation Polish immigrant, and Rashid (James Floyd) and Mo (Fady Elsayed), second-generation Egyptians. Moreover, such atypicality of content is matched by a subtlety of approach in terms of how matters of 'race' and ethnicity are interwoven into the respective coming-of-age narratives. On the one hand, Marek acclimatises gradually to life in England, and on the other hand, Rashid and Mo are embedded deeply in multicultural Hackney life, and are, for the most part, neither made to adhere to any Egyptian traditions nor especially interested in Egyptian culture or society.

To be precise, *Somers Town* (2008) revolves around Polish-born Marek, whose father is a guest worker at a King's Cross reconstruction site, and British-born Tomo (Thomas Turgoose), who has run away from a children's home in Nottingham – both of whom are new to the Somers Town district of Central London, and who form a firm friendship as they negotiate adolescence in their new surroundings. Indeed, set against the context of a huge increase in the Polish-born population of Britain, from 75,000 to 503,000 between December 2003 and June 2009, following the 2004 enlargement of the European Union (2010 report from the Office for National Statistics cited in Rydzewska 2010: 890-891), Joanna Rydzewska theorises that the story may be viewed as 'a meditation on how globalisation affects the notion of British identity and, more specifically, how this impacts on working-class British masculinity' (2013: 892) – with the juxtaposition of Tomo's absent family and Marek's father's conduct symbolising 'the disappearance of Northern and Midlands working-class masculinity' (2013: 906-907) and the reappearance of 'traditional working-class values, ... projected onto Polishness' (2013: 906). However, as she observes, too, as much as the story 'builds a clear opposition between the British boy, Tomo, whose

absent father and regional identity suggest a certain marginality, and Marek, the Polish boy, who is defined in terms of his present father, his Polishness and stable masculinity' (2013: 894-895), their relationship may additionally 'signify transnationalism' (2013: 904). Furthermore, when she posits that [r]ather than being defined by their respective nationalities, Marek and Tomo share a similar economic and marginal status' (2013: 904), she inadvertently points to the most important dynamic in the coming-of-age narrative in question – the way in which the respective journeys of the two adolescent protagonists are designed to complement one another, with shared activities and moments shown to be intrinsic to each boy's evolution. That is, Marek's Polishness is certainly not inconsequential: in one scene, his father asks him what he has learnt that day, and he reels off the new English words and phrases that he has picked up; in another sequence, he and his father practise their English by taking it in turns to read aloud from an agony aunt's page in a British newspaper; and there is an episode in which a man called Graham Cutler (Perry Benson), who lives in the same block of flats, gives him an Arsenal shirt to replace his Manchester United football shirt in order to 'keep safe' in the area. Rather, Marek and Tomo's bond is paramount, with the boys' burgeoning sexuality and growing sense of independence and responsibility eclipsing any differences arising from the fact that they have, hitherto, been brought up in different countries. For instance, although there is a degree of rivalry for the affections of French waitress Maria, what is more striking is the way in which they collaborate to show their feelings for her and, even, unite in their grief when they learn that she has suddenly had to return to France. And when they undertake some casual paid work for Graham, his gentle but firm guidance not only reveals in the boys the capacity to follow instructions and work as part of a team, but also inspires in the pair the same kind of entrepreneurship that he himself demonstrates. In addition, the drunken aftermath of Maria's departure leads to two conversations whose similarity is highlighted by being intercut: one in which Marek and his father disclose their respective feelings about Marek's mother and their situation, and thereby reach a better understanding of one another; and the other in which Graham offers Tomo the opportunity to stay with him 'for a bit' in return for helping out with various odd jobs. Thus Marek and Tomo are offered by, respectively, a father and a father figure, protection and guidance. Finally, the film's ending spells out how far Marek and Tomo have come in both their relationship and movement towards adulthood, with Marek's foreignness almost reduced to an irrelevance when Tomo says that he is going to 'get back to the old polishing' and Marek repeats 'polish' and laughs, and a conversation about visiting Paris one weekend, 'just us two, ... best mates', materialises in a coda whose warm colouring and Super-8 quality marks it out from the clearly defined black and white imagery of the rest of the film. In conclusion, then, whilst Marek's minority ethnic status is definitely portrayed as a factor in his adolescent development, its significance pales in comparison with that accorded to his friendship with Tomo.

With regard to *My Brother the Devil* (2012), the representation of Rashid and Mo's Egyptian heritage is, as with the treatment of Marek's Polish background, a significant strand in the narrative, but one that is handled in an understated manner. For example, one scene sees Mo eating the traditional Egyptian breakfast *fūl*, with Rashid cheekily helping himself to it, and their father recalling how people used to sleep on the roof when it was hot in Mansoura, to which Mo replies, 'Yeah, but we're in England, Dad; we don't sleep on rooves. That's why they're built like that [forms an upside-down V with his index fingers] – with a point. I ain't sleeping on no roof.' And in another sequence, the generation gap and cultural difference are once again crossed when Mo teases his father for trying to fix a radio that he has owned since 1976, and is either disinterested in or oblivious to the fact that his father is watching an Al Jazeera television broadcast concerning the 2011 Egyptian revolution, which began in the year that *My Brother the Devil* (2012) was filmed:

'I think ... the revolution in Egypt impacted every Egyptian, whether you live in London or are fully Egyptian living in Cairo. And it needed to be acknowledged because it's like the Berlin wall falling: there was life before, and life after; and people's consciousness was just different on both sides. I wanted this to be present day' (writer and director Sally El Hosaini, Verve Pictures DVD extra 'Director's Commentary').

Further to this, the cultural education that Rashid and Mo receive from their respective love interests, a photographer called Sayyid (Saïd Taghmaoui) and a Muslim girl called Aisha (Letitia Wright), is never delineated in any depth: Rashid is briefly shown reading *The Prophet* (1923) by Lebanese-American author Khalil Gibran, shortly after he starts to get to know Sayyid; Sayyid at one point plays a sample of Arab music and urges Rashid to embrace his 'roots'; and Aisha's abstention from alcohol and cigarettes 'serves as a useful restraint to Mo' (Rooney 2012). Indeed, there is just one episode that depicts a serious clash of Egyptian culture and British culture. When Sayyid has dinner with Rashid and Mo's family, and suggests that the Egyptian diaspora 'need[s] to get more involved with the democratic process' – 'why else did we end up here?' – Mo responds angrily that he and Rashid 'didn't end up' in Britain but were born there, and that 'this politics shit is bullshit', with politicians 'liars', and current wars a testament to this. Cherry may claim that the film pits homosexuality against the dominance of Islam in Egyptian culture by reading the moment at which the father makes obvious his disapproval of Rashid's relationship with Sayyid as 'propagating the view that to be Muslim is axiomatically homophobic' (2017: 1). But the reason for the father's denunciation is never spelled out, and there is nothing to suggest that he is a practising Muslim, meaning that such an interpretation does not hold up to scrutiny.

Pertinently, as highlighted in an interview with writer and director El Hosaini, who is herself 'half-Egyptian', the way in which Rashid and Mo are pictured as one of many minority ethnic youth living in London is particularly striking:

'I've lived on the same council estate ... in Hackney ... for over ten years. I wanted to make a film about the place I call home. ... I started writing the script shortly after the 7/7 London Tube bombings

and I was seeing a lot in the media about British Muslim youth being terror threats. I wanted to make the anti-terrorist film – a film that explored the real dangers and concerns of these youths' lives. I wanted to give an honest and three-dimensional depiction of them in cinema. I focus upon brothers of Arab descent, but their friends are originally Nigerian, Somali, Turkish, Jamaican, white and mixed race. ... This racially-mixed youth subculture fascinates me because this is real London! These are British boys. The truth is that they wouldn't last five minutes in the Middle East. They have an ambivalent relationship to Arab culture that's both familiar and alien to them. Their concerns are the universal concerns of all teenagers' (Dawson 2013).

As outlined earlier, Berghahn may choose to distinguish between 'coming-of-age films set in a multicultural milieu' and 'those set in a milieu in which race and ethnicity are normalised – and thus invisible and, presumably, socially irrelevant', but it is arguable that *My Brother the Devil* (2012) bridges these two categories by 'normalis[ing]' 'a multicultural milieu' (2010: 240). Indeed, the film may be usefully aligned with Carrie Tarr's definition of the French *banlieue* film, 'films set in multi-ethnic working-class estates on the urban periphery' (2004: 110), with such a classification lent weight by the use of Taghmaoui, who played one of the three main adolescent protagonists in one of the most internationally successful *banlieue* films, *La Haine* (1995), and who plays, here, a former gang member from *neuf trois* (a colloquial term for Seine-Saint-Denis, a department located to the north-east of Paris):

'I ... met Saïd when I was working on a different project, *House of Saddam* (2008), and it was when I was first writing this. And I told him about it and he loved the idea – the fact that I was attempting to do something very authentic. And his background in the *banlieue* of Paris is very similar to the background of the characters in the film' (El Hosaini, Verve Pictures DVD extra 'Director's Commentary').

In fact, so restrained is the treatment of issues of 'race' and ethnicity in *My Brother the Devil* (2012), that the only way that an audience would know that Mo is eating a traditional Egyptian breakfast is if they already knew of *fūl*, and likewise, the only way that they would know that Mo's father is watching an Al Jazeera broadcast about the 2011 Egyptian revolution is if they understood Arabic or were watching the Verve Pictures DVD extra 'Director's Commentary'. Hence the coming-of-age narrative of *My Brother the Devil* (2012) is certainly complicated by matters of 'race' and ethnicity, but such concerns are, ultimately, relegated to the background, with the relationship of the two brothers, and Rashid and Sayyid's intimacy – as discussed in Chapter Three – taking centre stage instead.

Black British Females

Whilst contemporary British coming-of-age films with black British female protagonists are far fewer in number than those with black British male protagonists, they are arguably more heterogeneous than the largely music-centred and gang-orientated stories of black British male adolescence. In *Burning an Illusion* (1981), twenty-two-year-old working-class Pat Williams (Cassie McFarlane) is transformed from a secretary with

conventional dreams of marriage and children, into an activist for the rights of black prisoners and black people more generally. In *R.H.I.N.O.* (1983), fifteen-year-old working-class Angie (Deltha McLeod) is a persistent school truant who prioritises looking after her young nephew over receiving a formal education and, consequently, ends up as a child in care. In *Babymother* (1998), working-class Anita/'Neeta' (Anjela Lauren Smith), who is in her late adolescence, tries to reconcile being a mother, daughter and partner, with her ambition of becoming a dancehall star. In *Kidulthood* (2006), fifteen-year-old working-class Alisa (Red Madrell) discovers that she is pregnant and, after trying to induce an abortion, is promised by the father of the baby that he intends to fulfil his paternal duties, just moments before he is killed. And in *Belle* (2014), which is set in the latter half of the eighteenth century and 'based on a true story', Dido Elizabeth Belle (Gugu Mbatha-Raw) lives a sheltered existence with her aristocratic guardians and has little prospect of finding a suitor because of her mixed black African and white British heritage until – pivotally – she meets a law apprentice who helps to open her eyes to both slavery and her own oppression, and with whom she falls in love, leading to marriage and children. Thus it may be said that the five films at hand depict the diverse aspirations of and challenges faced by their black British female adolescent protagonists, focusing in, variously, on educational matters, professional ventures, relationships with partners, the place of children, and issues of 'race' and ethnicity – notably, across two stages of adolescence, two centuries, and two social classes.

Naturally, there are numerous ways in which *Burning an Illusion* (1981), *R.H.I.N.O.* (1983), *Babymother* (1998), *Kidulthood* (2006) and *Belle* (2014) may be connected, but a logical starting point is to compare the depictions of the fifteen year olds, which have a significant gap of twenty-six years between them, but whose juxtaposition helps to illuminate the treatment of black British female adolescence in contemporary British cinema. Both Angie and Alisa are of school age, from single-parent families, and compelled to consider the role of a child in their lives. And yet the treatment of such subject matter in the respective portrayals is strikingly different. For Alisa – as, in fact, for all of the adolescent protagonists in *Kidulthood* (2006) – school is almost an irrelevance, with only the opening sequence conveying a rough sense of its place in her life, and the rest of the film showing what she and the other characters get up to on a day on which the school is closed, following the ominous suicide of a pupil. However, in *R.H.I.N.O.* (1983), the pressure that is put upon Angie to attend school more regularly, and the consequences for her in terms of living arrangements, are what constitute the narrative's central concern – as indicated by the title, which is an acronym designating persistent absenteeism (really here in name only), and the fact that the film is one of a quartet called *Tales out of School*, made for ITV in 1983. Moreover, whereas Alisa worries that pregnancy will make her 'fat' and, effectively, attempts an abortion by getting drunk and taking cocaine, Angie's inclination to look after her young nephew, Charly (Andrew Partridge), who has been abandoned by his mother and receives little attention from his father, is weighed up against the law of the land, subjecting her to a series of legal interventions that see her not only humiliated and patronised but,

eventually, wholly disempowered when she is taken away from her family for good. Firstly, she is visited at home by Educational Welfare Officer Brian Jellis (Derek Fuke), who tries to convince her of the benefits of a formal education. Next, she is discussed in a meeting between Jellis, social workers Joyce Barker (Victoria Burton) and Barry Clarke (Paul McDowell), and a teacher called Alan Bartlett (James Warrior), who all come to the conclusion that a care order – where she would preferably end up in a boarding school – is likely to be more effective than a supervision order. After all, they say, she has been in court for truancy eight times already, with her father accompanying her on only one occasion. Then, after an attempt to shoplift bacon and a subsequent tussle with police, she is ordered to appear in a juvenile court, who decide to send her to Fish Street Residential Assessment Centre, from which she soon escapes. And lastly, she is taken from her home back to the Assessment Centre, where she is informed that she is being transferred to Huddlestone House Secure Unit – the closing scenes showing her being made to strip, inspected closely by a woman wearing plastic gloves, and forced to have a bath, with her final words, ‘It’s not right, you know. It’s not right’, simply met with the stern instruction, ‘Wash yourself.’

In addition, it is essential to recognise that Angie’s minority ethnic heritage is framed as a factor in her trajectory, with Bartlett’s support for a care order partly grounded in his belief that children from West Indian backgrounds are inherently difficult:

‘The fact that she’s black leaves her with a very poor self-image. ... We have problems – big problems with the West Indian children. ... I’m sorry, but it’s a fact. We have a much higher rate of criminal activity, of truancy, of maladjusted and disruptive behaviour, and a much higher rate of referral to special units for black children than for white – right across the board. I’m sorry, but it’s a fact. They unquestionably generate problems. It sticks in my throat to have to say it, but it’s the truth. I have to deal with it every day at school, in my work. I see it.’

Although Barker’s complaint to Clarke, after Bartlett leaves the aforementioned meeting, is conspicuous – ‘They’re not West Indian; they’re English,’ she protests – even her significant empathy with Angie’s position proves to be inadequate in the long run. Hence, in spite of any noble intentions held by the adult figures of authority with whom Angie comes to interact, no one seems to be able to help her to resolve her predicament, and the result is that Charly loses the love of an attentive aunt, she loses her sense of purpose, and a family is torn apart. With a generally sullen manner and appearing to lie at one point, telling a fellow resident at Fish Street that the policewoman involved in her arrest called her a ‘nigger’, Angie may not be an especially sympathetic figure, but she is clearly a victim of both a negligent family and a somewhat problematic social services system, and is certainly stigmatised because of her minority ethnic roots.

By contrast, the tales of black British females in their late adolescence are generally much more optimistic in tone, with the uplifting final scenes of *Burning an Illusion* (1981), *Babymother* (1998) and *Belle* (2014) fundamental to an overriding sense of positivity after Pat, Anita and Dido are pictured in a range of difficult situations. As detailed in the remainder of this section, these narratives depict deep-seated patriarchy and misogyny and,

in the case of the first and third titles, entrenched 'racism' too. However, crucially, these various forms of discrimination are shown to be challenged by the protagonists, turning the coming-of-age stories into vehicles for anti-'racist' and feminist sentiment.

In *Burning an Illusion* (1981) – which was Menelik Shabazz's first feature film, funded by the BFI⁷⁵ following his experience on the set of *Pressure* (1975)⁷⁶ and thirty-minute documentary about London-born black youth, *Step Forward Youth* (1977) – Pat's opening voiceover characterises her as a young woman looking for a lasting relationship: 'I was twenty-two, not doing too bad. I had my own flat, a steady job. But that wasn't enough. I wanted to settle down. Somehow, though, I never seemed to meet anybody I could really feel for. You know what I mean?' Thus when she meets Del Bennett (Victor Romero Evans) and finds him pleasant company, there begins a predictable chain of events – of dating, introducing him to her parents, and letting him move in – with the long-term aim of getting married and having children. Critically, so determined is Pat to fulfil her dream that when, after a year, she asks him to 'settle down properly' and he claims that he is 'not ready', and is unlikely to be ready for at least half a year, she persists in trying to make the relationship work – even supporting him financially when he loses his job due to tardiness, and putting up with his subsequent idle, demanding and abusive behaviour as he moves between record shops, social clubs, and gatherings with his male friends that he inconsiderately holds in the living room at home. Nevertheless, it is only a matter of time before she reaches the end of her tether and orders him to leave, and this is when she truly begins to grow as an individual. Initially, she is reluctant to become as politicised as her friend, Cynthia (Angela Wynter), who 'has an interest in African art and fashion and promotes "black" consciousness' (Korte and Sternberg 2004: 67) – 'As usual, Cynthia had something to say about my life. She said I should get involved with something – you know, come to political meetings – but I wanted other things out of life'. However, whilst her initial reticence to forgive Del for his previous conduct gives way to gradually welcoming him back into her life, it is essential to recognise that she does not simply revert to her earlier plans. When Del is sentenced to four years in prison for pulling a knife on a policeman – importantly, in self-defence – Pat becomes a patient and understanding partner who visits and writes to him regularly. And agitated by Del's reports of racist behaviour inside, and spurred on by literature on black history, which she picks up from a community bookshop called Grassroots, she stops wearing make-up, braids her hair, starts to dress more casually, becomes a volunteer for 'an organisation struggling for the rights of black prisoners', and eventually turns into an activist for the rights of black people more generally – still determined to fight oppression even after she is injured in a drive-by shooting, and shown,

⁷⁵ In the BFI DVD 'Introduction', Menelik Shabazz describes the opportunity given to him by the BFI:

'The BFI was really the only place that independent filmmakers could go and, at the time, the BFI had a tradition of kind of empowering new voices and different kinds of filmmaking. ... If the BFI hadn't existed, then *Burning an Illusion* (1981) definitely wouldn't have been made, there's no doubt about that. And also the experience of working with the BFI at the same time was very free. I really didn't have anyone who was looking over me in that sense, and I was given the money and allowed to go away and make the film that I wanted to make, which is very unique.'

⁷⁶ In the BFI DVD 'Introduction', Shabazz says of *Pressure* (1975): 'It was a film that influenced me because I was on the set. It gave me a marker, a sense of possibility.'

in the film's concluding sequence, to have evolved into a woman with a keen sense of political purpose. 'I never believed that my life and dreams could have changed so much. Now, like others, I am part of the struggle for equal rights and justice,' she pronounces in her final voiceover, as she is seen throwing her old (Barbara Cartland) romance novels into a rubbish chute and then sitting in the back of a minibus with other black women, this time dressed in African-style clothes, singing:

'You say you gonna do our works. You say you gonna see it through. You should wait on I one. You shoulda get your portion done. I tell you, it's time to do your work. All these words a go change our history. These words a go change the way we feel. Words a go change our suffering. Right now it's time for militancy. Cos these words a go change our history. These words a go change the way we feel. And these words a go change our suffering. Right now it's time for militancy. Militancy. Militancy. Militancy. Militancy. Yes I...'

As Shabazz asserts in the BFI DVD 'Introduction', the film

'evoke[s] a period that was very volatile – a period where Margaret Thatcher came into power on the basis of strong police powers, immigration and race were kind of strong issues, and also the fact that the right-wing elements (the national party, the National Front) were also very active at the time. And it was felt in some cases that the Conservatives had taken the vote of some of those kind of ideas. So the climate at the time was one of unease, certainly. In addition to that, you also had the use of the 'sus' law – the law of being a suspected person – which was used by the police against young black people a lot, to the point that it criminalised a large section of the young population that was coming up. It was particularly noticeable at that time, so there was a lot of dissatisfaction for young people who were born in the UK, who were being treated as immigrants and were completely separated really, and felt that way. Also, you had a situation where there was a black consciousness movement that was kind of live at the time, which was led though Rastafari and kind of reggae music. So you had a kind of rising consciousness of the injustices that was happening. And at the same time, you had the atmosphere of kind of racism in the air. And so all of that led to a very heavy, volatile, active situation.'

Furthermore, Shabazz states of the title and its application to Pat:

'What does 'burning an illusion' mean? 'Burning an illusion' for me was the recognition of self. Black people have become almost emasculated from who they are. They have become separated and caught up in thinking that in order for them to become – to *become* – they had to become somebody else. They had to kind of put on a mask, and that mask would become who they are. And what's happening in that process is that you then lose yourself, and then you also become disconnected from reality – and that's kind of the point. For me, when you look at the story, Pat is striving, and she thinks that to strive is to conform, whereas Del, at one point, has a sense of trying to conform, but really he can't ... fit into this kind of strait-jacket. And so for me the 'burning illusion' is about – whether it's a male or whether it's a female – that in order to be true to who you are, in order to be realistic in terms of how you see your relationship with each other, you have to first know yourself to come to that point, because without that, everything else is an illusion.'

In short, the overarching message of *Burning an Illusion* (1981) is that successful individualisation and socialisation is possible only if one endeavours to stay true to oneself.

In comparison, *Babymother* (1998) takes a markedly different approach to examining how a young black British woman's coming of age is affected by her minority ethnic heritage – the action set in Harlesden, which has long been renowned for its minority ethnic groups⁷⁷, and Anita's story in part a celebration of reggae, dancehall and ragga, 'which can ultimately be traced back to ancestral African roots' (Leggott 2008: 108), and which has earned the particular ward of Brent in question the accolade of 'London's reggae capital'. Indeed, although the film was '[h]eavily (and misleadingly) marketed as a "reggae musical"' (Allon, Cullen and Patterson (2001: 144), Hall observes that it certainly tapped into 'the latest musical sound (and look) to capture the imagination of Britain's urban black youth' (1998: 25). And correspondingly, despite its employment of an all-black cast, Moseley-Wood puts emphasis upon its embodiment of cultural hybridity, granting it with a particular national significance:

'The major characters are second- and third generation West Indian immigrants who may sometimes speak Jamaican *Creole* but do so with British accents. They consider themselves British and belonging to Britain, but a Britain that they have totally redefined using Jamaican popular culture. And significantly, not the popular culture of their parents' era, but contemporary Jamaican culture – the music and esthetic of the dance hall. ... This leaning towards and affinity with the cultural expression and forms of urban Jamaica should not be seen, however, as a nostalgic throwback to ancestral origins but rather as an attempt by these second-generation immigrants to define and create their own reality. The film's evocation of the dance hall's ambience and esthetic can be seen as the endorsement of an alternate lifestyle and set of values that ultimately challenge the prescribed lifestyle and manners of the white English mainstream. The primacy accorded the dance hall, therefore, is a declaration about the ongoing transformation and redefinition of a culturally monolithic England into a diverse multicultural society' (2001: 61).

Moreover, Moseley-Wood goes so far as to claim that *Babymother* (1998) allows 'West Indian immigrant descendants ... to proudly assert their "primacy, relevance and significance at the site of the imperial culture ... which has historically relegated them to the margins and periphery"' (Moseley-Wood 2004: 91 cited in Leggott 2008: 108).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that in the same way that *Burning an Illusion* (1981) sets issues of gender alongside matters of 'race' and ethnicity, so *Babymother* (1998) foregrounds gender equality and motherhood as much as the culture of a particular minority ethnic group. For instance: Anita is essentially a single mother to two young children, Anton (Anton Rice) and Saffron (Saffron Lashley); the woman who is initially presented as her mother, Edith (Corinne Skinner-Carter), turns out to be her grandmother; and following the death of Edith, Rose (Suzette Llewellyn) confirms what Anita had suspected for many years – that she is not actually Anita's older sister, but her biological mother, and was a 'babymother' like Anita, explaining why Edith took on the responsibility of raising Anita. Thus the film overtly explores the role of mothers and, in particular,

⁷⁷ According to Brent Council's 2014 'Harlesden Diversity Profile', the 2011 census showed the ward to have a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) population of 67%, including an Asian population of 14.4% and a black population of 40.0%, with 47.1% of residents born in the UK (2017).

mother-daughter relationships – with the generational conflict between the three females, and the contrast between Edith's religious devotion, Rose's job as a professional businesswoman, and Anita's pursuit of a musical career adding layers of tension.

Further to this, *Babymother* (1998) pits female agency against male domination – with the strained relationship between Anita and the father of her children, Byron (Wil Johnson), both a central feature of the plot and explicitly symbolic of a wider marginalisation of females within the reggae, dancehall and ragga scene. Hall's review points out how the film divided '[c]ultural critics ... trying to unravel what [it] has to tell us about the current state of play in the gender wars' (1998: 25), portraying dancehall as 'one form of the cultural emancipation of young black women', but also, somewhat problematically, centring the arguments between Anita and, on the one hand, Byron, and on the other hand, her two fellow performers, Sharon (Caroline Chikezie) and Yvette (Jocelyn Jee Esien), upon Anita's infidelity with Sharon's boyfriend, Caesar (Vas Blackwood), in return for studio time. Nevertheless, overall, Anita's coming-of-age story is arguably one of female enfranchisement, culminating in her performance with Sharon and Yvette, against Byron, in a dancehall competition that Hall identifies as 'the film's main narrative drive' (1998: 25). Prior to this, Byron had expressly disapproved of Anita's ambition, telling her, 'We don't need more than one musician in this family', and when asked why, retorting with, 'Cos you're my babymother, that's why!' But in the final showdown of the dancehall 'clash', not only do the 'rudegirls' win, but Anita, the 'rebel', as she calls herself, succeeds in reconciling her desire to perform, with both her role as a mother, and her relationship with her own mother. Singing, whilst dressed in the erotic outfit of a 'dancehall queen', and as her mother and children watch on in the crowd, lyrics that 'hit out ... against Byron's earlier deception and chauvinism for not being able to accept her as a female artiste' (Dudrah 2011: 123), she performs to her children a composition whose chorus she had sung earlier on in the narrative:

'Babymother, be a mother to your child:

Don't ever let your child feel

That it's not worthwhile.

Babymother, be a mother to your child:

No matter how hard the road;

No matter how tough the trial.'

Crucially, too, whilst Anita, Sharon and Yvette are turned down by established promoter Luther (Don Warrington), his casual and foolish dismissal of the talented young women is counterbalanced by an act of female solidarity when his ex-girlfriend and now boss of Beez Neez Promotions, Bee (Diane Bailey), takes them on instead.

In contrast to the way in which *Burning an Illusion* (1981) and *Babymother* (1998) address contemporary social and cultural developments – namely, the ‘black consciousness’ movement of the early 1980s, and the popularity of certain black music traditions in the late 1990s – *Belle* (2014), which is set from 1769 to 1783, brings together a historical figure, Dido Elizabeth Belle (1761-1804), and a historical event, the hearing of the legal case of Gregson versus Gilbert before the Supreme Court in 1783. Belle was the daughter of a black African slave, Maria Belle, and a white British naval officer, Sir John Lindsay, and was entrusted, at the age of four, to the keeping of Lindsay’s uncle, William Murray, the 1st Earl of Mansfield, and his wife, Elizabeth Murray, the Countess of Mansfield. The Gregson versus Gilbert case pertains to the disputed payment of an insurance claim for black African slaves who drowned when they were thrown overboard by a captain of a British slave ship in 1781 – an event more commonly known as the Zong massacre – with its outcome playing a notable role in the establishment of Britain’s anti-slavery movement in 1783 and, eventually, the passing of the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act. That is, where Pat turns from secretary looking to ‘settle down’, into black rights activist, and Anita transitions from single mother looking for a record deal, into ‘dancehall queen’, Dido, as she is referred to in the film, develops from a carefree, naïve and obedient girl, into a young woman who, in becoming conscious of slavery and her own disenfranchisement because of her ethnic roots, comes to question her place in British society and the wider world – motivated to educate herself about the aforementioned legal case because of its personal relevance and, in accordance with her new knowledge and understanding, increasingly outspoken about discrimination against herself and other black people in British society. Furthermore, in the same way that Pat’s relationship with Del, and Anita’s relationship with Byron, are important strands in the evolution of the respective young women, so Dido’s relationship with a vicar’s son turned law apprentice, John Davinier (Sam Reid), is inextricably intertwined with her metamorphosis.

To be more precise, the first stage of Dido’s life with the Murrays is presented as a time of safety and innocence, with a clear emphasis put upon her transformation from a young child in rags, amidst the hustle and bustle of a busy port, into a well-presented little girl who is cared for in the privileged setting of Kenwood House in Hampstead. Critically, all talk of her mixed ethnicity is shown to take place when she is out of earshot, such as the conversation between William Murray and his wife as they watch, from an upstairs window, Dido and Elizabeth Murray, another niece in their guardianship, playing outside:

‘William Murray, 1st Earl of Mansfield: ... [I]n accordance with her birthright she is entitled to live beneath this roof. That is the nature of order.

Elizabeth Murray, Countess of Mansfield: And where in that order should her colour be placed? Above or below her Murray bloodline? Marriage?

William Murray, 1st Earl of Mansfield: Impossible. Any match her “other origins” would attract would surely disgrace her and the family’s rank.’

However, when an editing cut sees the young Dido and Elizabeth disappear behind a tree and reappear as adolescents, the story begins to explore more boldly the implications of being a black female growing up in late eighteenth-century Britain – and, indeed, the black experience and the female experience more generally in that period – with ensuing scenes drawing out further the sense of conflict between class, ethnicity and gender that William Murray and his wife discuss in the aforementioned exchange. For example, the news that Lindsay (Matthew Goode) has died and left Dido an inheritance of £2000 a year leads Elizabeth to complain that her own father's new wife does not want him to leave her anything, and congratulate Dido on her good fortune: 'With such a dowry you may marry into any good family you wish.' And Elizabeth later develops her thoughts on the matter when she asks Dido, 'Aren't you quietly relieved that you sha'n't be at the caprice of some silly Sir and his fortune? The rest of us haven't a choice. Not a chance of inheritance if we have brothers, and of any activity that allows us to support ourselves. We are but their property.' But whilst Elizabeth is accurate in her representation of the kinds of restrictions faced by upper-class females in late eighteenth-century Britain, her belief that Dido's inheritance puts her in a position of greater privilege than that which she herself enjoys is proven naïve. Throughout the drama, Dido's ethnicity is shown to be the grounds for a variety of forms of exclusion that inhibit her individualisation and socialisation in spite of her wealth. When the girls are told of the imminent arrival of dinner guests, for instance, Dido is informed by Lady Mary Murray (Penelope Wilton), the girls' governess and the manager of the household, that she is only permitted to attend the after-dinner gathering, compelling her to press William Murray, 'Papa, how may I be too high in rank to dine with the servants, but too low to dine with my family? ... Am I not wealthy now? An heiress? Surely that changes matters?', to which he replies, 'Dinner with guests is a formal proceeding, Dido. We simply can't impose upon visitors our disregard of those formalities. ... Finance may go some way, but society has a habit of disregarding even one of its own.' Likewise, Davinier's explanation of slavery to Dido, and subsequent questioning of her own marginalisation within Kenwood House, unsettles her to such a degree that she later sits at her dressing room table and pulls and beats at her skin in anger and frustration. In fact, there is only one member of the Murray household with whom Dido appears to truly identify, and that is Mabel (Bethan Mary-James), the black maid at Kenwood House, who at one point shows her how to brush her hair using a technique passed down to her by her mother, and of whom Dido asks William Murray, pointedly, for clarification as to whether or not she is a slave.

Of particular note is the way in which a fraught intersection of class and ethnicity is encapsulated in the pronounced differences between the attitudes of Dido's two romantic interests – the aforementioned John Davinier, and the son of Lord and Lady Ashford (Miranda Richardson), Oliver Ashford (James Norton). On the one hand, Ashford's attraction and marriage proposal to Dido is undermined by not only the overt 'racism' of his mother and brother, James (Tom Felton) – the latter of whom even manhandles her in a lecherous manner – but also the way in which he sometimes echoes their irrational prejudice:

'Oliver Ashford: See how my heart beats? I am utterly taken with you, Miss Lindsay.

Dido: Despite such pronounced protestations from your brother?

Oliver Ashford: He cannot overlook your mother's origins as I do. ... Why should anyone even pay her regard when your better half has equipped you so well with loveliness and privilege?

On the other hand, Davinier not only helps Dido to understand the Gregson versus Gilbert case, to their mutual benefit, but also finds the moral courage to accuse his mentor of hypocrisy – or, at least, obtuseness – in failing to make a connection between the mistreatment of slaves, and the generally favourable but nevertheless inconsistent treatment of Dido: 'Then know that when you are gone, your legacy will be to have left Miss Lindsay in a world where she may be worth more dead than alive.'

In addition, the commissioning of a portrait of Dido and Elizabeth – in which they are, significantly, presented as equals – is deployed symbolically to draw attention to the Murrays' acceptance of Dido as an established and welcome member of the family at a time when there had, hitherto, been no black members of the British aristocracy. And so keen are the filmmakers to convey the Murrays' recognition of Dido as one of the family that they frame her as a pivotal figure in Mansfield's ruling on the case of the Zong massacre – according her with the role of helping to establish that the ship had passed up the opportunity to replenish the slaves with potable water at eight different ports, by secretly showing some of the legal documents to Davinier, who then presents the evidence to Mansfield in the hope that he will use it in his position as 'the most powerful man in England, next to the king'.

The coming-of-age story of *Belle* (2014) is, then, one in which the black female protagonist is a historical figure whom the drama endows with the ability to not only find love and marriage against the odds, but also veritably change the course of history. Like Lynda of *Wish You Were Here* (1987), Billy of *Billy Elliot* (2000), Jenny of *An Education* (2009), and Ginger and Rosa of *Ginger and Rosa* (2012), Belle is placed 'on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other' (Bakhtin 2006: 23). And as is the case for all but Rosa, '[t]his transition is accomplished in [her] and through [her]' (Bakhtin 2006: 23), with the narrative casting her as a symbol of the historical and ongoing fight for 'racial' and gender equality. Indeed, Mayer judges *Belle* (2014) as 'a more than worthy talisman (and more than a worthy talisman) for both an emergent feminist historical drama and an emergent diverse British cinema' (2016: 100), citing Hall's article 'Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representations' (2000), in which he 'describe[s] the recovery of cultural identities through historical investigation as "a very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation amongst hitherto marginalized peoples"' (Hall 2000: 705 cited in Mayer 2016: 100), and asserting that the film 'gives the lie to the wall-to-wall whitewash of historical dramas, rehabilitating the genre as she goes' (Mayer 2016: 100-101).

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the film indulges in a high degree of fictionalisation: firstly, crediting Belle with more influence over William Murray than she is likely to have had; secondly, altering the portrait of Belle and Elizabeth Murray; and thirdly, providing incorrect information about Davinier and his relationship with Belle. To begin with, although the diaries of a former governor of Massachusetts, Thomas Hutchinson, who visited Kenwood House in 1779, opine that Belle and William Murray were remarkably close – ‘she was called upon by my Lord every minute for this thing and that, and shewed the greatest attention to everything he said’ (Diu 2016) – History Professor James Walvin states in his review of *Belle* (2014) that ‘the filmmakers make free with recently published material on the *Zong*. In truth, Belle is nowhere to be found in the *Zong* affair – except that is, in the film’ (2014). Furthermore, Walvin clarifies that the representation of ‘Mansfield’s adjudication ... [as] the first bold assertion towards the end of slavery’ is overblown: ‘In reality, he merely stated that there should be another hearing of the *Zong* case – this time with evidence not known at the earlier hearing’ (2014). Moreover, whilst Kenwood House’s accounts reveal that Belle was well looked after – with ‘a four-poster bed draped in chintz, mahogany furniture in her rooms, and costly remedies purchased when she was ill’ – they also show that her annual allowance was only £30, in comparison with the young Elizabeth Murray’s £100 (Diu 2016), contradicting the narrative’s presentation of the former as financially better off than the latter. And despite showcasing, on one of the intertitles before the final credits, the real-life portrait of Belle and Elizabeth Murray that ‘picqued the curiosity of [scriptwriter] Misan Sagay ... and started the decade-long process of getting the film made’ (Diu 2016), the version of the painting that appears within the diegesis tones down Belle’s African heritage by not including the turban that she wears in the original. In fact, even the representation of Davinier as a law apprentice is incorrect, as he was actually a steward at St George’s church in Westminster’s Hanover Square (Minney 2005), and whilst one of the intertitles claims that ‘Dido and John married and had two sons’, giving the impression of a happy-ever-after future for the two characters, there is evidence to suggest that they had at least three children in total, and that Belle died at the relatively young age of forty-three (Minney 2005). Hence the BFI’s obvious attempt to present a piece of ‘forgotten history’ is arguably undercut by the film’s abandonment of historical accuracy, leaving Walvin wondering ‘who would be spinning faster in their grave: Lord Mansfield or Dido Elizabeth Belle?’ (2014). That is, taking such a degree of artistic licence in the telling of Belle’s story is patently problematic, even if it satisfies audiences, as it generally appears to have done.

British Asian Females

Of the two contemporary British coming-of-age films with British Asian girls, *Anita and Me* (2002) and *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), the latter is more well-known. Released on an unprecedented 450 prints, it generated £2 million on its opening weekend in the UK and

became the year's most successful non US film at the box office, and accordingly, it has generated a great deal of scholarly interest, for example, from Korte and Sternberg (2004), Roy (2006), Projansky (2007), Berghahn (2010 and 2013), Lindner (2011) and Rings (2011). By contrast, *Anita and Me* (2002) has received far less attention, despite also portraying the coming of age of its second-generation Indian adolescent female protagonist and focusing upon her friendship with a white British girl. More specifically, set in 1972, in the fictional village of Tollington in the Black Country, Meera Syal's semi-autobiographical film, based upon her novel of the same name (1996), follows Meena Kumar (Chandeep Uppal) as she makes and breaks friends with Anita Rutter (Anna Brewster). And in the same way that *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) draws a line between Jesminder Kaur 'Jess' Bhamra's (Parminder Nagra) conduct at home and behaviour outside of the home, so *Anita and Me* (2002) shows Meena exploring her femininity, burgeoning sexuality, and Britishness when she is out and about with Anita:

'I wanted to capture a part of English life that is gone. For the children, the first generation born and growing up here, the whole home-based social life was Indian, but outside the house you were completely different – switching accents and persona to be like your friends' (Meera Syal).

However, unlike in *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), where 'racism' certainly figures, but is cast as secondary to issues of gender equality, *Anita and Me* (2002) frames it as an instrumental source of tension in Meena and Anita's relationship, with Anita choosing to date a racist who attacks a family friend and, eventually, Meena. Moreover, whereas *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) plays down issues of class, *Anita and Me* (2002) draws a line between 'racism' and socio-economic disadvantage, with middle-class Meena's experiences of 'racial' discrimination and working-class Anita's misfortune of growing up in a 'broken home' put on a level.

Conclusion

It can be seen, then, that contemporary British coming-of-age films with protagonists who are first, second or third-generation immigrants depict, in the main, black British and British Asian (principally Pakistani) youth – with a modest degree of attention accorded to those of Jewish, Polish and Egyptian heritage. Furthermore, there are two key ways in which issues of 'race' and ethnicity are shown to shape the coming-of-age process for protagonists from a minority 'racial' and/or ethnic background. Firstly, in alignment with Berghahn's formulation of the 'diasporic coming-of-age film' (2010: 241), some of the films situate their protagonists within a conflict between minority ethnic cultural conservatism and Western liberalism, the former, typically located within the family (*My Beautiful Launderette* [1985], *East is East* [1999], *Bend It Like Beckham* [2002], *Bradford Riots* [2006] and *Everywhere and Nowhere* [2011]), but in one case exhibited by the protagonist (*Sixty Six* [2006]). Indeed, in these narratives, the protagonists may be said to embody Hall's notion of 'new ethnicities'

(2006), in that they do not seem to see themselves as one 'race' and ethnicity or another but, instead, as somewhere 'in-between', a 'hybrid' (Bhabha 1994). Secondly, some of the films examine the impact of 'racism' upon the protagonists – *Babylon* (1980), *Burning an Illusion* (1981), *R.H.I.N.O.* (1983), *My Beautiful Launderette* (1985), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), *Wild West* (1992), *East is East* (1999), *Rage* (1999), *Wondrous Oblivion* (2001), *Anita and Me* (2002), *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), *Bradford Riots* (2006), *Kidulthood* (2006), *Attack the Block* (2011), *Everywhere and Nowhere* (2011), *Wuthering Heights* (2011) and *Belle* (2014) – exploring how it not only inhibits and disenfranchises, but also inspires resistance and activism.

Moreover, in dividing the films into black British males 1980s and 1990s, black British males 2000s and 2010s, British Asian males, Jewish British males, other minority ethnic males, black British females, and British Asian females, manifold connections are revealed, and whilst it is unnecessary to revisit all of them here, four patterns are of particular importance. Firstly, the activities of creating, sharing, and generally enjoying music – characteristically, within the context of a musical youth subculture – are framed as integral to the adolescent development of a number of protagonists, and normally figured as acts of resistance to and transcendence from 'racism' and socio-economic disadvantage. Most obviously, this applies to black British males in films of the 1980s and 1990s (*Babylon* [1980], *Young Soul Rebels* [1991] and *Rage* [1999]), but it also pertains to two British Asian males (*Wild West* [1992] and *Everywhere and Nowhere* [2011]), and one black British female (*Babymother* [1998]). Secondly, urban gang culture forms the context in which mainly black British males in films of the 2000s and 2010s are usually shown to come of age, with maturation often equated with the attempt to leave the scene (*Bullet Boy* [2004], *Kidulthood* [2006], *Adulthood* [2008], *Shank* [2009], *Shank* [2010], *Anuvahood* [2011], *Attack the Block* [2011], *Everywhere and Nowhere* [2011] and *My Brother the Devil* [2012]). Thirdly, the lifestyle choices (interests, chosen career path, choice of partner, choice of friends, etc.) of British Asians are invariably drawn as at odds with the expectations of their families, especially their fathers, uncles and brothers, whom the protagonists frequently defy (*My Beautiful Launderette* [1985], *East is East* [1999] and *Everywhere and Nowhere* [2014]) – and this is also the case for one black British male (*Babylon* [1980]), one male of Moroccan and white British descent (*Anuvahood* [2011]), and one male of Egyptian heritage (*My Brother the Devil* [2012]). And lastly, black British and British Asian females are typically cast as caught between domesticity and either a career or political activism (*Burning an Illusion* [1981], *Babymother* [1998], *Bend It Like Beckham* [2002] and *Belle* [2014]), with the latter invariably positioned as the pivot upon which coming of age turns.

Contemporary British coming-of-age films with minority ethnic protagonists constitute, then, a rich exploration of how issues of 'race' and ethnicity can shape adolescent growth, and it is hoped that this chapter has succeeded in highlighting some of the most significant lines of continuity.

Conclusion

The overarching aim of this thesis has been to illuminate a type of film which is arguably underappreciated in film studies in view of its prevalence – the British coming-of-age film, which revolves around either an individual adolescent protagonist or a pair or group of adolescent protagonists, and is set wholly or mainly in Britain. Whilst there is already an extensive body of work on the image of youth in American (especially Hollywood) cinema, and a growing interest in the treatment of childhood and adolescence in other national cinemas, stories of adolescence set in Britain tend to be subsumed under other critical and generic categories – such as the social problem film, social realism, historical cinema, the heritage film, comedy, urban cinema, romantic drama, women's cinema, queer cinema, black British cinema, and British Asian cinema – if acknowledged at all, and this denies them 'a large part of their substance and appeal' (Bell and Williams 2010: 6), and goes some way towards explaining why so few appear in scholarship on films about youth. Importantly, generic hybridity is common, whether in the form of explicit crossbreeding or subtle interplay, and this in part accounts for the critical neglect of the manifestation of the coming-of-age genre in contemporary British cinema. However, this study identifies no fewer than one hundred and seventy-eight British coming-of-age films made between 1979 and the present day, but no sustained attempt to address the prominence of the figure of the adolescent in this period of British cinema history. Hence this thesis provides a vital contribution to debate about the nature of contemporary British cinema, not only foregrounding coming-of-age films not featured in prior scholarship, but also generating new insights into those that have been discussed but not under the umbrella of the coming-of-age genre.

Further to this, the study endeavours to take a distinctive period of social change in Britain, marked economically, politically and culturally by neoliberal ideology, and show how British coming-of-age films have enjoyed a revival in this time, constituting a major vehicle for the dramatisation of various social, political, economic and cultural issues of the day. That is, whilst some explore the impact of certain policies and laws upon, and the role of state institutions in the lives of young people, others situate their protagonists within narratives that, more broadly, accentuate ways in which the factors of class, gender, 'race', ethnicity and sexual orientation can shape individualisation and socialisation. Moreover, some films – especially those set in the past – set adolescent growth within or against a development and/or an event and/or a movement of national/historical significance, casting the protagonist as a progressive figure and, thereby, rendering their transformation a symbolic form of modernity or, indeed, Britain's future.

More specifically, after surveying theories about adolescence, and scholarship on, firstly, the literary precursor of the coming-of-age genre, the *Bildungsroman*, and secondly,

predominantly American films with adolescent protagonists and/or directed at adolescent audiences, the thesis presents a working definition of the coming-of-age genre that will hopefully be of particular use to scholars of films about youth: (a) the coming-of-age genre consists of stories about adolescence, inflected, variously, by other generic traits and/or particular formal and stylistic features, and in different national contexts; and (b) heterogeneity within the coming-of-age genre is counterbalanced by the repeated appearance of certain issues, character types, plot devices and narrative arcs. Indeed, this formulation offers an alternative to Timothy Shary's clearly influential but somewhat limiting identification of five main 'subgenres' of 'youth/teen film' in American cinema of the 1980s and 1990s – 'most' of which, he claims, are 'revised from past trends in the genre' (2002: 8) – as the terms 'youth film' and 'teen film' give rise to the potential conflation of films about adolescence with films aimed at adolescents, and although Shary's conceptualisation is logical within the framework of a national cinema with a strong tradition of genre production, distribution and exhibition, it proves difficult to apply to those national cinemas organised along different lines, and runs the risk of ignoring significant patterns across 'subgenres'.

Following an outline of the chief characteristics of the coming-of-age genre, the study discusses its incarnation within contemporary British cinema – laying out its key conventions, considering existing interpretations of some of the films, and exemplifying some of the most conspicuous lines of continuity within the stories of male protagonists, female protagonists, and protagonists from a minority 'racial' and/or ethnic background – and whilst it would be repetitious to restate each chapter's findings and arguments, it is worth elucidating the ways in which the thesis serves to consolidate knowledge and understanding of the coming-of-age film as an important category in contemporary British cinema.

Firstly, in concentrating upon the dramatic treatment and function of emerging sexuality, educational endeavours and professional pursuits, socio-economic disadvantage, and (normally older) brothers, Chapter One's examination of the boy-centred films not only provides a new perspective on the place of male adolescence in contemporary British cinema and, indeed, of adolescence in British cinema more generally, but also challenges aspects of scholarship on British cinema's longstanding tradition of social realism, and introduces another side to the debate about representations of masculinity in contemporary British cinema. Where discussions of working-class male adolescents in contemporary British cinema display a propensity to put emphasis upon the structural inequities faced by protagonists, and to divide the dramas into fairy tales and tragedies, the process of scrutinising a wider evidence base uncovers a less polarised picture. All of the films with working-class protagonists do, indeed, highlight social injustices but, crucially, many also address the role of personality in determining a protagonist's trajectory, and there are, more accurately, not two but three main trajectories, namely, successful or failed individualisation and socialisation, and more ambivalent outcomes. Furthermore, whilst

critical attention given to issues of masculinity in contemporary British cinema has honed in on a so-called 'crisis of masculinity' affecting characters who are middle-aged or in their advanced years, especially fathers or father figures, turning to depictions of boyhood reveals how some films explore the consequences of a father or father figure's 'crisis' for his son(s) or charge(s) – some including both a father and older brother 'in crisis', and others replacing the father with an older brother 'in crisis'. Admittedly, the delineation of the three main trajectories for working-class boys is rather convoluted in its attempt to bring into play the plots of tens of films. In hindsight, it might have been more effective to take two standout features of the narratives – the involvement of many protagonists in criminal activity, and the way in which the death of a significant other is pivotal to the maturation of several protagonists – and compare their treatment across the three main trajectories. Moreover, it would be worthwhile to look at how the three main trajectories exhibit themselves in the stories of middle-class and upper-class protagonists, and to see if certain generic hybrids possess an inclination towards one of the trajectories over the others. Nevertheless, such breadth stands as testament to the weight of the male coming-of-age film in contemporary British cinema – its numbers making it the prototype of the contemporary British coming-of-age film.

Secondly, of what little scholarship on the girl-centred films there is, specifically adolescent female concerns tend to be framed within and thereby obscured by a broader preoccupation with 'women's issues'. And whilst the theme of escape, especially from a working-class background, justifiably looms large in analyses, the recurrent appearance of the configuration of the girl in a consensual or non-consensual relationship with a married/duplicious/abusive/exploitative man is customarily downplayed or ignored, even though it pertains to about a quarter of the films about girlhood. Therefore, Chapter Two provides a vital corrective, proposing that the frequent depiction of consensual and non-consensual relationships between girls and men – in some cases fictional, and in a few cases based upon true events – may be connected productively with a burgeoning national interest in the socio-cultural phenomenon of the sexual abuse and exploitation of young people (the media, the police and the government documenting and investigating an ever-growing number of allegations). Critically, none of the narratives cast their protagonists as passive victims, or to put it another way, none of the protagonists are denied a degree of agency. However, the male characters are drawn habitually as inherently exploitative, with working-class girls shown to be likely targets, particularly for middle-class men. Overall, then, if the chapter is lacking in its failure to juxtapose the portrayals of girl/man relationships with the portrayals of girl/boy relationships – the latter of which are, by and large, more conventional and positive – it reveals a neglected strand of scholarship and points to the capacity of the contemporary British coming-of-age film to explore social taboos.

Thirdly, although a number of films with protagonists from a minority 'racial' and/or ethnic background have received critical attention, it has become somewhat standard to

view them as exemplary of developments within 'black British cinema' and 'British Asian cinema', according them a kind of 'burden of representation' (Mercer 1988: 8 cited in Hill 1999: 210) that engenders debate about authenticity, political correctness, progressiveness, and 'the persistence of racialisation' (Malik 2010: 145). Hence Berghahn's conceptualisation of the 'diasporic coming-of-age film' (2010: 241) has been a helpful intervention, singling out the conspicuous pairing of the image of youth with issues of 'race' and ethnicity in contemporary European cinema, and attempting to identifying conventions. However, Berghahn's formulation that the protagonist's family and peer group are pitted against one another, and that at the end of the narrative the protagonist is compelled to choose between the two cultures, does not recognise more nuanced explorations of what it is like to grow up with a minority 'racial' and/ or ethnic heritage. As Chapter Four details, British cinema has long used the figure of the child or the adolescent in depictions of 'racial' prejudice, ethnic discrimination, and cross-cultural encounters, and there are certainly narratives in which the denouement involves a choice between family and peers, as observed by Berghahn. However, having scrutinised representations of black British males, British Asian males, Jewish British Males, other minority ethnic males, black British females, and British Asian females in contemporary British coming-of-age films, it may be said that if there is any one distinguishing trait of the films in question, it is the propensity to deconstruct essentialist notions of 'race' and ethnicity and, instead, embrace and examine the hybridity and plurality inherent in the lives of those from a minority 'racial' and/or ethnic background. Indeed, some protagonists are shown to ultimately reject both their family and their peers, and others are positioned as symbols of 'racial' and/or ethnic reconciliation by bridging the differences between their family and their peers.

Naturally, the limitations of the study, such as omissions and alternative approaches, have come into clearer view towards the end of the writing-up process. For instance, any one of Chapters Three to Five could have been developed into a thesis in itself, allowing for closer textual analysis, and the research would have perhaps been more manageable if it had followed Shary's focus on 12-20 year olds, putting to one side for future enquiry those films dealing in late adolescence on the grounds that school-aged adolescents and adolescents who have left school tend to face challenges of a different nature. In addition, the study does not draw out sufficiently the differences between the tales of early, middle and late adolescence, or capitalise adequately upon the identification of three main trajectories. Nevertheless, the thesis seeks to demonstrate how the subject matter of adolescence has captured the imagination of filmmakers and audiences alike, and engender a deeper appreciation of contemporary British coming-of-age films and the coming-of-age genre more generally. Having long enjoyed tales of pronounced personal growth and taught in state secondary schools in England for thirteen years, the opportunity to research the coming-of-age genre and its manifestation in contemporary British cinema has proved both analytically fruitful and personally fulfilling. It had been a surprise to discover so many contemporary British coming-of-age films, but so little scholarship on them. Indeed, whilst

American coming-of-age films are already an established field of academic enquiry, the British coming-of-age film has remained its poor relation. Thus this thesis offers an important intervention, hopefully helping to secure the place of the contemporary British coming-of-age film in both scholarship on British cinema and scholarship on the coming-of-age genre.

Filmography

1. *Quadrophenia* (1979)
2. *Scum* (1979)
3. *That Sinking Feeling* (1979)
4. *Babylon* (1980)
5. *Burning an Illusion* (1981)
6. *Gregory's Girl* (1981)
7. *Experience Preferred ... But Not Essential* (1982)
8. *P'tang Yang Kipperbang* (1982)
9. *Made in Britain* (1983)
10. *Meantime* (1983)
11. *R.H.I.N.O.* (1983)
12. *Those Glory Glory Days* (1983)
13. *Another Country* (1984)
14. *A Room with a View* (1985)
15. *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985)
16. *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985)
17. *Absolute Beginners* (1986)
18. *Maurice* (1987)
19. *Rita, Sue and Bob Too!* (1987)
20. *Two of Us* (1987)
21. *Wish You Were Here* (1987)
22. *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988)
23. *The Fruit Machine* (1988)
24. *The Rachel Papers* (1989)
25. *Buddy's Song* (1991)
26. *Young Soul Rebels* (1991)
27. *The Long Day Closes* (1992)
28. *Wild West* (1992)
29. *The Cement Garden* (1993)
30. *Backbeat* (1994)
31. *Shopping* (1994)
32. *An Awfully Big Adventure* (1995)
33. *Sense and Sensibility* (1995)
34. *Beautiful Thing* (1996)
35. *Emma* (1996)
36. *Small Faces* (1996)
37. *Stella Does Tricks* (1996)

38. *Trainspotting* (1996)
39. *House of America* (1997)
40. *The Girl with Brains in Her Feet* (1997)
41. *The Slab Boys* (1997)
42. *Twenty Four Seven* (1997)
43. *Twin Town* (1997)
44. *Under the Skin* (1997)
45. *Babymother* (1998)
46. *Cider with Rosie* (1998)
47. *Elizabeth* (1998)
48. *The Land Girls* (1998)
49. *Velvet Goldmine* (1998)
50. *A Room for Romeo Brass* (1999)
51. *East is East* (1999)
52. *Get Real* (1999)
53. *Human Traffic* (1999)
54. *Rage* (1999)
55. *Ratcatcher* (1999)
56. *The Trench* (1999)
57. *The War Zone* (1999)
58. *Virtual Sexuality* (1999)
59. *Billy Elliot* (2000)
60. *Borstal Boy* (2000)
61. *Care* (2000)
62. *Kevin and Perry Go Large* (2000)
63. *New Year's Day* (2000)
64. *Purely Belter* (2000)
65. *Storm Damage* (2000)
66. *There's Only One Jimmy Grimble* (2000)
67. *The Testimony of Taliesin Jones* (2000)
68. *Gabriel and Me* (2001)
69. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001)
70. *Me Without You* (2001)
71. *My Brother Tom* (2001)
72. *The Hole* (2001)
73. *About a Boy* (2002)
74. *A.K.A.* (2002)
75. *Anita and Me* (2002)
76. *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002)
77. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002)
78. *Morvern Callar* (2002)

79. *Nicholas Nickleby* (2002)
80. *Pure* (2002)
81. *Sweet Sixteen* (2002)
82. *I Capture the Castle* (2003)
83. *Wondrous Oblivion* (2003)
84. *A Way of Life* (2004)
85. *Bullet Boy* (2004)
86. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004)
87. *My Summer of Love* (2004)
88. *Top Spot* (2004)
89. *Yasmin* (2004)
90. *Green Street* (2005)
91. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2005)
92. *Pride and Prejudice* (2005)
93. *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (2005)
94. *Bradford Riots* (2006)
95. *Driving Lessons* (2006)
96. *Kidulthood* (2006)
97. *London to Brighton* (2006)
98. *Sixty Six* (2006)
99. *Starter for Ten* (2006)
100. *The Great Ecstasy of Robert Carmichael* (2006)
101. *The History Boys* (2006)
102. *This is England* (2006)
103. *Atonement* (2007)
104. *Becoming Jane* (2007)
105. *Brick Lane* (2007)
106. *Control* (2007)
107. *Hallam Foe* (2007)
108. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2007)
109. *Popcorn* (2007)
110. *Son of Rambow* (2007)
111. *St Trinian's* (2007)
112. *Summer Scars* (2007)
113. *Adulthood* (2008)
114. *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* (2008)
115. *Better Things* (2008)
116. *Cass* (2008)
117. *How To Be* (2008)
118. *Is Anybody There?* (2008)
119. *Somers Town* (2008)

120. *Wild Child* (2008)
121. *An Education* (2009)
122. *Awaydays* (2009)
123. *Cherrybomb* (2009)
124. *Fish Tank* (2009)
125. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2009)
126. *Nowhere Boy* (2009)
127. *Shank* (2009)
128. *St Trinian's 2* (2009)
129. *The Firm* (2009)
130. *The Scouting Book for Boys* (2009)
131. *The Unloved* (2009)
132. *Tormented* (2009)
133. *Cemetery Junction* (2010)
134. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - Part 1* (2010)
135. *Neds* (2010)
136. *Shank* (2010)
137. *Soulboy* (2010)
138. *Submarine* (2010)
139. *Toast* (2010)
140. *West is West* (2010)
141. *4.3.2.1.* (2010)
142. *Albatross* (2011)
143. *Anuvahood* (2011)
144. *Attack the Block* (2011)
145. *Chalet Girl* (2011)
146. *Demons Never Die* (2011)
147. *Everywhere and Nowhere* (2011)
148. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - Part 2* (2011)
149. *Sket* (2011)
150. *The Inbetweeners Movie* (2011)
151. *Wuthering Heights* (2011)
152. *Broken* (2012)
153. *Ginger and Rosa* (2012)
154. *Hunky Dory* (2012)
155. *I Am Nasrine* (2012)
156. *Love Bite* (2012)
157. *My Brother the Devil* (2012)
158. *Now Is Good* (2012)
159. *Offender* (2012)
160. *Gone Too Far!* (2013)

161. *Great Expectations* (2013)
162. *How I Live Now* (2013)
163. *Sixteen* (2013)
164. *Starred Up* (2013)
165. *The Selfish Giant* (2013)
166. *Belle* (2014)
167. *God Help the Girl* (2014)
168. *Pride* (2014)
169. *Queen and Country* (2014)
170. *Testament of Youth* (2014)
171. *The Goob* (2014)
172. *The Inbetweeners 2* (2014)
173. *The Riot Club* (2014)
174. *Cider with Rosie* (2015)
175. *Just Jim* (2015)
176. *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2015)
177. *The Falling* (2015)
178. *The Pass* (2016)

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